



Sun Microsystems

The Time Machine: Saving Sun Customers 1,200 Years

SCORECARD

- Average time to solution decreased 52% for internally escalated cases.
- Average time for customer to close problems fell 43% for internally escalated cases.
- High-level engineers focus on complex problems rather than those handled at the front line.
- On track to reduce customer wait time by over 1,200 years per year.

CLIENT: Sun Microsystems is a leader in industrial-strength hardware and software services to many of the world's leading companies.

CHALLENGE: A reorganisation of the Sun support organisation created an opportunity to improve troubleshooting of customer problems worldwide. Like any support organisation, Sun understood that customers dislike repeating information, repeated calls for additional information, and waiting for an issue to be resolved. Sun sought to dramatically improve the quality and speed of information transferred between engineers, increase opportunities to use knowledge gained on future issues, and significantly reduce customer wait time.

SOLUTION: Kepner-Tregoe® and Sun developed and implemented the Sun Global Resolution Troubleshooting method (SGRT), a programme to reduce the time Sun engineers take to solve customers' complex problems. This well-integrated, global programme consists of:

- A customised training course for support engineers to learn and apply the unique KT approach to troubleshooting that is taught by Sun employees who are certified to lead the programme
- Analysis of the performance system and integration of changes that support the new troubleshooting approach
- Coaching and monitoring protocols for escalated cases
- Business process integration
- Application of Six Sigma discipline for measurement of changes and results

RESULTS: Sun's global performance experienced radical change. The type and nature of questions being asked of customers improved. Better data is being captured and recorded sooner. The time to resolve escalated problems has been cut in half. Most important, the improvements made have been sustained, placing Sun on track to save customers more than 1,200 years' worth of wait time.

(continued)





How Sun Did It

“None of our other IT vendors/partners are doing this kind of thing—this is great!”

—Sun Customer

“What differentiates IT suppliers is the service and support our customers receive. Sun Global Resolve Troubleshooting has provided a clear win in terms of customers staying with Sun, especially as we move the process out into our strategic clients. The response has been phenomenal.”

—Mark Hayden, Sun Sigma Black Belt

OBJECTIVES

The project objectives were clear:

- Reduce the average time it takes Sun Product Technical Support to offer a solution to an escalated case
- Reduce the average age of escalated cases
- Improve consistency of service
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Give Sun a demonstrable competitive advantage in the Services market
- Increase customer loyalty
- Improve engineer confidence and customer interaction
- Deliver a sustainable change at the individual and organisational levels

CHALLENGES

Following the technology boom, Sun used tighter criteria than ever before when making decisions to invest time and money to improve performance. This project was no exception. The project team planned and checked every element of the project. Each step had to be justified and controlled. It was essential that the project deliver clearly measurable improvement. For this challenge, Six Sigma techniques proved vital for demonstrating early results. Each project stage, at each location, was piloted first. Only when results had been demonstrated was approval given to extend the rollout.

The organisation had already undergone serious change that had altered some core processes and key metrics. To counteract “change fatigue,” the project team communicated frequently with relevant stakeholders by e-mail, conference call, and in person. In addition, a web page on Sun’s intranet contained all related project support information and many primary outputs from the project.

To demonstrate management commitment and help make the process approach more visible, the director in charge of the project became certified by KT to train his senior management colleagues. He made sure that his peers modeled process thinking by applying it to issue resolution.

Finally, the team engaged Sun’s leading, most respected engineers to drive implementation. Some were selected to be trained as certified KT Programme Leaders to provide process facilitation, mentoring, and coaching. Others helped design the SGRT Tool that supports engineers to ask the right, context-specific questions.

KEY COMPONENTS

The project had six key components:

1. A customised training course — Sun Global Resolution Troubleshooting (SGRT) — was designed jointly by KT and Sun, using the unique KT troubleshooting concepts. It is delivered by Sun engineers trained by KT to deliver and coach SGRT skills.
2. The KT performance system model helped Sun to create a work environment that encourages and enables individual engineers to use their new skills. In particular, clear and unambiguous triggers were set for escalating cases between frontline engineers and backline, technical experts. KT and Sun jointly developed documents that describe and clarify what questions should be asked and how information should be documented.
3. The establishment of a coaching protocol requires every escalated case around the world to be reviewed daily and coaching provided to each engineer.
4. Business process integration was a key element of the project. Sun revised some of its standard worldwide procedures to incorporate SGRT protocols.
5. The SGRT Tool—software developed using Java technology, helps engineers answer the correct questions before handing a case over.
6. Finally, the application of Six Sigma thinking gave the project essential measurement and discipline.

The project met all of its objectives and overcame all challenges. Solution times were cut and consistency of service improved. Customers cited Sun’s troubleshooting approach as a positive differentiator.

Where next? Sun sees opportunities to more closely integrate the troubleshooting work of Sun customers and other suppliers who serve Sun customers by using KT troubleshooting.

Sun envisions an end-to-end common language and problem-solving approach that benefits everyone, industry-wide.