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Best practises and experiences in user support –A case study at GARUDA

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To improve quality of user support GARUDA Help Desk (GHD) extends single point gateway to Indian national grid computing initiative – GARUDA users. All operational, usage and computing related issues from scientists, academicians, system administrators and network service providers are effectively managed and addressed.

GHD has unified portal to receive queries from users. Over all focus of GHD is to provide suitable and efficient support structure. Objective of this paper is to share our experience/best practices which is successfully being adopted in user support. Various facts and figures are presented.

User can report to GARUDA Help Desk (GHD) through any mode of communication like telephone, email and web portal. All the reported issues are converted as ticket at web portal named Request Tracker. Within 24 hours, a user will receive an e mail notification about ticket owner and the status. Same will be updated in web portal also, intermediate status of the ticket will be updated in the web portal until it is closed.

The challenges involved in GARUDA user support and how GHD (ticketing system) helps to better services is discussed in this paper. In GARUDA, the resources are heterogeneous in nature and spread across India. Maintaining grid availability and reliability is highly challenging in a federated environment. Some of the challenges to mention are: remote ssh access, sudden cluster down time, faster support to users, provisioning of large home areas for user, lack of cooperation from remote system administrators, slow response time for reported ticket, routing the tickets to right affiliate, tracking the progress of ticket, tracking the ticket status, so on.

Most of the issues are related to remote cluster, where remote system administrators' support was required to resolve the issues. To mitigate suitable tools are deployed, but hard to find a tool to work as per the need. Hence in-house developed automatic scripts were deployed. Another best practice is all the issues reported by users are recorded. Like nature of ticket, its category, methodology used in solving, actual solution etc are documented, preserved and made available for reference. We have found that proper monitoring methodology, highly transparent and interactive work culture and adhering to quality standards gives good results in effective user support. Another key practice followed is collecting "Annual user feedback", which helps us to restructuring of GHD guidelines and processes. Hence we are able to progressively improve user support. It is proudly said that transformed ordinary user support to extraordinary successfully.

GHD handles 400 to 500 requests (tickets) per month. Average ticket handling time by respective owner is 8 Hrs. All the ticket handling operations are adhering to ISO 9001:2008 quality management standards. GHD has reduced redundancy of ticketing and improved the capability of sharing problem and solutions among the administrators.

Summary

In this paper authors have shared best practices and experiences in user support through GARUDA help desk. Also the paper has covered GARUDA help desk operational process, procedures, and the challenges.

Primary author: Mrs MG, Divya (C-DAC)

Co-authors: Mr S, Henrysukumar (C-DAC); Mr J, Santhosh (C_DAC)

Presenter: Mr J, Santhosh (C_DAC)

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