

Staffing Desktop Support

Written by Mike Hanson, Senior IT Manager, UnitedHealth Technologies
 Data analysis by Jenny Rains, Senior Research Analyst, HDI

If you've been a desktop support manager for any length of time, odds are you've been faced with questions from leadership on staffing levels. Are you staffed appropriately? How do you even determine whether your current team is sized correctly? Desktop support offers some real challenges when trying to make these determinations, because the nature of the work can be very different from that of support teams like the service desk.

Unfortunately, there's no standardized approach or magic formula for calculating the appropriate staffing ratio; there's simply too much variation in the desktop support arena for a one-size-fits-all approach. The purpose of this research brief is to examine the data from the *2012 HDI Desktop Support Practices & Salary Report* and leverage that information to offer a possible starting point for making sound staffing decisions for desktop support. (For the purposes of this brief, desktop support is defined as the technical support level beyond the service desk.)

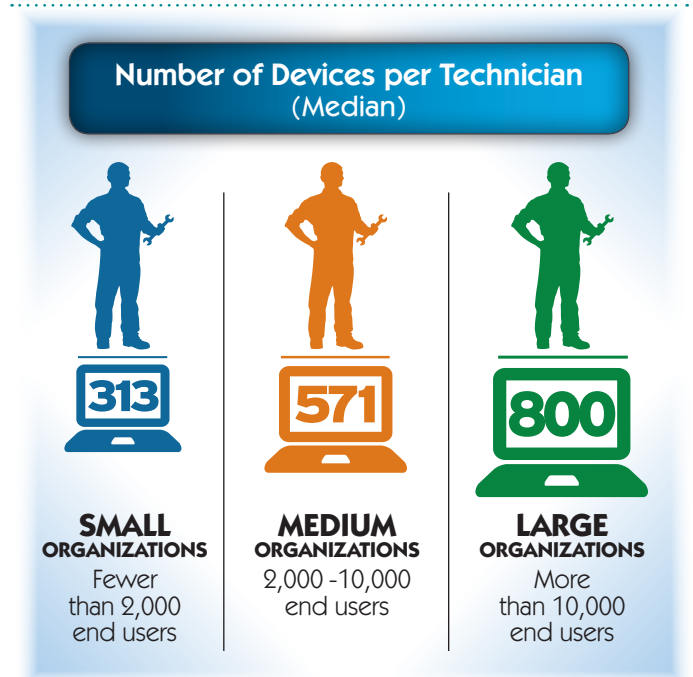
There are several key areas that need to be considered when determining the best approach to staffing:

- **Breadth** – How does the size of a business impact staffing?
- **Scope** – How does the overall scope of support affect the number of employees?
- **Model** – Which model does the organization favor: blended support or support silos?
- **Focus** – How does a strong technical or customer service focus impact staffing?

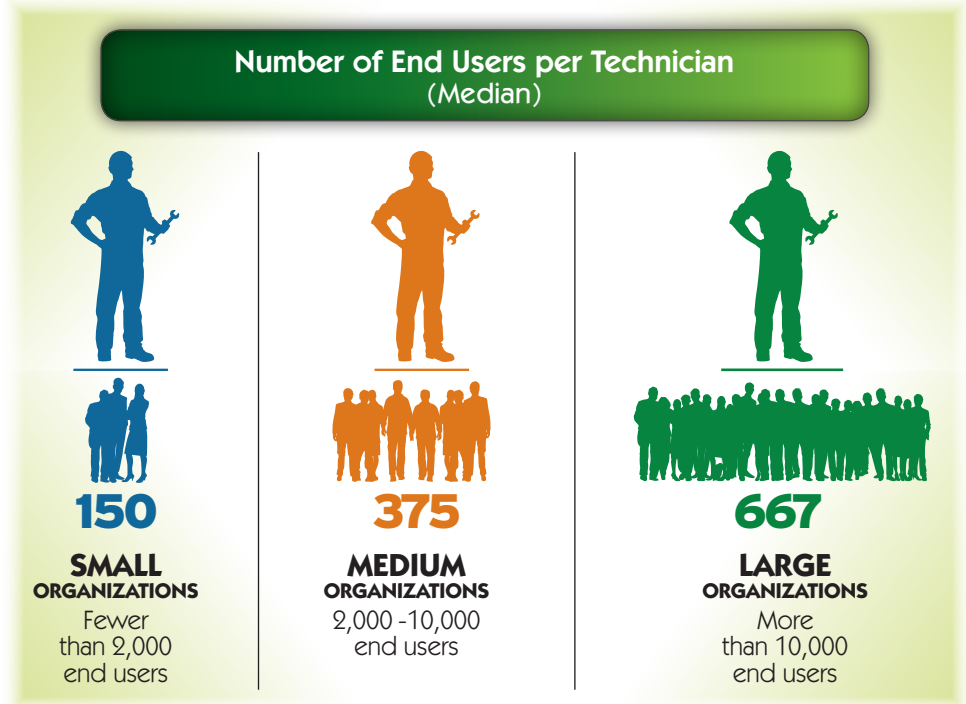
Breadth of Support

It's not surprising that a business's size influences desktop support staffing. After all, the more people or devices that need assistance, the larger the desktop organization must be to provide that support. What's not as intuitive is that the rate of growth isn't even. That is, as the number of people or devices needing support increases, the number of desktop support analysts increases at a reduced rate.

The data show that for small organizations supporting fewer than 2,000 end users, desktop support will typically support 313 devices per technician. From 2,000 to 10,000 users, the support ratio grows to one desktop technician for every 571 devices. In large organizations, those whose end-user populations exceed 10,000, the support ratio jumps to 800 to one.



Many organizations prefer, instead, to measure support against the population being supported. This can be a frustrating approach, since supported hardware almost always outnumbers supported staff. But, in general, the same rule holds true. The research shows that smaller businesses (fewer than 2,000 clients) average 150 end users per support technician. Medium-sized businesses (2,000 to 10,000 end users) see that number go up to 375 to one, while large organizations (more than 10,000 end users) realize the greatest efficiencies, with the support ratio increasing to 667 to one.



Why do larger organizations enjoy a more efficient support ratio? Simple: economies of scale. A corporation with a large end-user base likely has very mature support processes. Smaller teams are also more likely to have other responsibilities outside of desktop support, while larger organizations are more likely to be divided up into support silos. This, combined with deeper pockets for investing in self-service or automation tools, results in a smaller desktop support team.

One such tool is remote support. This gives the support organization the ability to either provide widespread support from a centralized location or offer technical support staff the opportunity to work from home. Larger organizations are nearly twice as likely as small or medium-sized businesses to offer technical staff the option of telecommuting.

Scope of Support

The scope of support—that is, looking at what’s actually being supported—will influence how many technical analysts are needed. Scope of support is often closely related to breadth of support, in that smaller organizations generally have more responsibilities for devices beyond the desktop. Larger companies tend to be narrower in their approach to technical support, with desktop support focusing strictly on desktop-related issues.

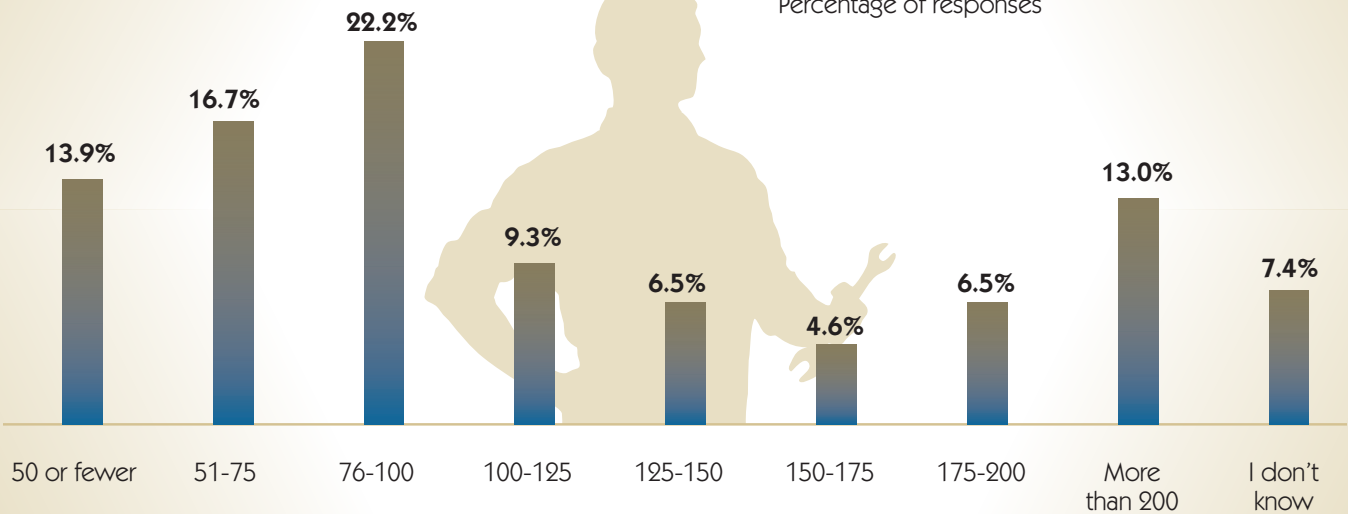
For example, there may be a perception that smaller organizations, which may not have dedicated network support teams, are more likely to provide support for network equipment. However, the data show otherwise, with 20 to 25 percent of small, medium, and large organizations supporting no network equipment.

Likewise, there is little difference attributable to size in the arena of mobile support. The perception may be that a bigger organization would be more likely to support smartphones or similar equipment. After all, they would have more mature support processes and a larger end-user population. But the data clearly shows that the widespread adoption of mobile technology by an increasingly mobile workforce has forced technical support to keep up with mobility, regardless of the size of the business.

Ticket volumes also have a major influence on how many support professionals are needed. In an organization where incidents and service requests are combined, a technician can work 76–100 tickets per month. If historical reporting on monthly volumes is available, you can use it to make a rough estimate as to how many technical staff might be required.

Number of Tickets Closed by One Technician in a Month

Percentage of responses



Support Model

As technology improves, organizations are able to support end users more efficiently. This often means that the service desk can handle incidents that once might have been assigned to desktop support. Self-service, remote tools, active monitoring, and other technologies all give support organizations a leg up. In fact, some organizations have moved away from the traditional silos and have merged the service desk and desktop support into a single cohesive support group.

Desktop Support Function in the Support Organization



59%

The desktop support and support center teams provide distinct and separate functions.



35%

Desktop support is a function within the support center where analysts take on support center and desktop support roles as required (i.e., jump and run).



6%

Desktop support is a support center function where analysts rotate support center and desktop support roles as scheduled (i.e., support center analyst role for two weeks, then desktop support technician role for two weeks).

Merging the service desk and desktop support has a significant effect on staffing, but that effect is somewhat surprising. In the traditional support structure, where desktop support is distinctly different from the service desk, the support ratio tells us that one technician can support 583 devices. In the slightly less common rotation-based structure, where technicians spend part of their time as service desk analysts and part as desktop support technicians, the ratio is similar, at 536 to one.

However, in organizations that have adopted a blended model, where desktop support is a function of the service desk and analysts can take on either role, the support ratio is drastically different, at 370 to one. This may seem counterintuitive, as you might expect the data to bear out the assumption that, by blending desktop support and the service desk, you would be less likely to need additional technical support staff.

It appears that this type of blended model typically exists in smaller organizations, with 72 percent supporting fewer than 250 devices. We might infer from this data that those teams are less mature, or have additional responsibilities beyond technical support. That being said, it's worth noting that this blended model results in a median time to resolve that's very similar to the silo model, and better than the rotation-based structure.

Customer Service or Technical Focus?

One of the things the data can't show us is the overall focus of the businesses being surveyed. This is always something to consider when determining the proper staffing ratio.

If there's a desire for strong customer service, more staff will probably be required, enabling analysts and technicians to spend more time with end users as they work through their problems. If efficiency is the goal, with a team that has a strong technical background, less staff may be required. For example, much of desktop support can now be done remotely, so there's less need for in-person visits. Some companies may opt for less personalized customer service in favor of an efficient, centrally located support team.

Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, there's no magic formula for staffing. On average, the overall staffing ratio, based on the *2012 HDI Desktop Support Practices & Salary Report*, is 333 end users per technician, but that's without context. When determining how many desktop support staff your organization needs, consider the industry and size of the business. Think about what this team will be supporting: will it be strictly desktop devices, or will there be a mix of other technology, like network equipment or a mobile workforce? Consider which support model would be most effective in a particular environment, and decide whether the focus will be on customer service or quick, clinical efficiency.

Ultimately, it's all about moving an incident along to resolution. Consider the variables noted above and decide on the best approach for each of them. Then apply this to real data; this is where good reporting on ticket volumes is critical. Based on the expectations of breadth, scope, model, and focus, determine how many tickets an analyst can complete in a given period, and then factor that into the overall volume. The end result should be a reasonable staffing ratio.

Sponsored by

BOMGAR™

For all available HDI Research Corner reports, visit www.ThinkHDI.com/BePartOfTheCorner.

Copyright © 2013 UBM LLC. All rights reserved.