Quick Answer: Who Should Do Tier 3 Support in Agile Product Delivery?

Published 12 July 2021 - ID G00752128 - 3 min read

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Application and software engineering leaders moving to agile product delivery struggle with application support. Traditional models often have a separate application maintenance team separate from the project team. For agile product delivery, Tier 3 support activities must move to the product team.

Quick Answer

Who should do Tier 3 support of agile products?

- The product team must be accountable for all changes to the application product.
- If there is a product team currently developing new features for the product, they should also do Tier 3 support activities, such as bug fixes, maintenance, and minor enhancements.
- Tier 2 support should escalate to the product team any incident or request that requires knowledge of the application code or configuration to diagnose, fix or enhance the product.
- The product team should include Tier 2 support personnel in product planning and demos, and share documentation so that they can learn about new features and changes.

More Detail

In a project environment, the project team delivers the finished application to the support team, who then takes full responsibility for supporting it. The reason many organizations do this is that either the project team is disbanded after go-live or they are working on the next phase of the project and don’t want to be distracted.
The types of support are generally referred to as tiers or levels depending on what knowledge or skills are required to deal with the user's request:

- **Tier 0** — Self-service tools — such as password reset, FAQs and knowledge articles.
- **Tier 1** — Simple answers or procedures to fix common problems — for example, accessing a printer, restarting a hung application, or implementing a scripted solution.
- **Tier 2** — More complex issues requiring experience with specific applications — for example, master data issues or set-up problems.
- **Tier 3** — Problems requiring developer knowledge to diagnose and requiring code changes in a new release — for example, bug fixes, minor enhancements or technical upgrades.

Support teams doing Tier 3 work need to gain much of the knowledge of the original developers. This requires extensive documentation and extended time examining the code to understand how it works. Gartner's IT Key Metrics data indicates that support organizations spend 50% of their time on bug fixes, minor enhancements and technical upgrades that require this knowledge.

Splitting new development and Tier 3 support work creates an accountability and quality problem. The project team can throw the release over the wall to the support team. Even if there are many problems remaining, the support team is then relied upon to make it work. Handling Tier 3 work on the product team makes them accountable for all changes to the product. They have an incentive to do high quality work so problems don't come back to them.

In an agile product delivery organization, if there is a product team currently developing new features for the product, they should also do Tier 3 support activities such as bug fixes, maintenance, and minor enhancements. In this scenario:

- Tier 2 support should escalate to the product team any incident or request that requires knowledge of the application code or configuration to diagnose, fix or enhance the product.
- These items will be placed on the backlog along with new product features and stories.
The product team should include Tier 2 support personnel in product planning and demos, and give them access to documentation so that they can learn about new features and changes. This should reduce the incidence of issues that do not require code changes being escalated to Tier 3.

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