

# Incident Management

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## *A beginners guide*

Incident Management is often the first port of call when organisations are beginning an ITIL® process implementation. Incident Management gives you some very valuable quick wins with your customers and is a relatively easy process to get working, at least at a basic level.

While I would usually recommend that any process implementation starts with the creation of your Service Catalog, good management of incidents is something that is very visible to your customers and can get you that all important management buy-in to go further with your process initiation and improvement plans.

## **Where do we start?**

Even if you are not going to produce a Service Catalogue at this stage, at the very least you need to have some idea of the Service Levels you are going to offer to your customers. Many early implementations I have worked on do not have any negotiated SLAs, but most do have some idea of just how fast they can resolve common incidents.

Use this knowledge as a starting point for producing your first Service Level Agreement. If you are going to start your incident management without negotiating and agreeing this SLA with your customers, you MUST, at the very least, advertise it to them. Managing customer expectations is key to keeping them satisfied.

## **What is an Incident?**

ITIL® describes an incident as “an unplanned interruption to an IT Service or a reduction in the quality of an IT Service. Failure of a configuration item that has not yet impacted service is also an incident”.

Incidents can be reported to the Service Desk by customers or users, or they may be picked up by your event management systems. Incidents should be differentiated from requests and queries either by logging categories or by recording in a separate Request Management module in your toolset (see our whitepaper on [Request Fulfilment Management](#) for more information).

ALL incidents must be logged, no matter how minor they seem. This allows you to get a true picture of the stability of your infrastructure and robustness of your services.

There are some grey areas when trying to separate incidents from requests...if a customer rings to have their password reset, is this a request or an incident? It can be argued either way – in some ways it is “an unplanned interruption” to the service being received by the customer...does the fact that it has been caused by their forgetfulness make it a request? Or does the fact that they are unable to do any work until it is reset make it an incident? This type of question is what makes every

ITIL® process implementation unique, and I really don't think that there is any right or wrong answer. You log it according to your own business rules; just make sure that your ServiceDesk staff are all on the same page to ensure consistent logging.

## **Incident Management is where the fires are fought!**

The goal of Incident Management is “to restore normal service as soon as possible”. You simply want to get your customers back to work in the shortest period of time. This can often require a sticking plaster approach, you should not be wasting time looking for the underlying cause or trying to implement a permanent fix – this is the role of the problem management process.

Your incidents should be closed as soon as your customer is able to continue with their work – example:

John rings at 10:20am to report that he is unable to print a PDF document to the printer in his office. You connect to his machine and see that he has tried multiple times to print the document; each attempt is stuck in the print queue with an error status. John requires this document for a meeting that he has to attend at 10:30am.

You clear the print queue and try one more time to print, with the same result, in order to get the document printed for John's meeting; you set him up with the multi-function printer in the office down the hall and send the PDF to this printer, where it prints successfully. John is able to collect his document and get to his meeting in time.

So what happens to this incident now? John is now able to work, so my view is that this incident should now be closed. There is an acceptable workaround; John knows that he needs to print PDF documents to the Multi-function printer. Obviously there appears to be an issue with the printing of PDF documents to this printer, but that is not an issue for the incident management process, it should be escalated to Problem Management where it will be assessed and prioritised with a view to providing a permanent fix.

Incident management is where you fight the fires – Problem management is where you prevent the fires from starting in the first place – see our whitepaper on problem management for more information.

## **Knowledge is your best weapon**

ITIL® V3 promotes the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom model. In simple terms this just means that you need to take the data that you extract from your Service Management toolset and turn it into Knowledge that your frontline staff can use to more efficiently support your customers.

While Knowledge Management is primarily a role of the Service Transition phase of the ITIL® lifecycle it is key to effective Incident Management in the Service Operation phase. Ensuring that accurate, easy to follow information is available on all Known Errors, workarounds etc is available at the point of logging will improve important KPIs such as your first time resolution rate.

Effective communication between the people responsible for your Service Transition processes – Change and Release Management - will ensure that the knowledge about known errors in new services is given to the Service Desk before the Service is made available to customers.

Providing Self-Help services to your customers via a web portal can be a very effective way of providing excellent customer satisfaction, while at the same time reducing the load on your service desk team. If customers can visit your online service desk and immediately see the current status of the services you provide there will be a reduction in the number of repeat calls when services fail. The most important key to achieving this is to keep this Service Status information up to date at all times, your customers only need to see inaccurate information on this portal once for them not to trust it in the future.

Giving customers access to searchable knowledgebases containing step by step instructions for resolving common issues is also well worth implementing, when calls are logged that could have been resolved by following one of these guides, you can gently remind customers where this information can be found in future.

I cannot stress the importance of keeping these knowledge stores up to date enough. As soon as your customers find out-of-date data here, they will stop using it. You need to make the maintenance and editing of this information a regular and constant part of your routine.

## Managing the queue

Absolutely critical to the success of your incident management process is having an incident manager who has the responsibility and authority to manage the incident queue. A flat structure will not work in the long term; if you make everyone responsible for the process the long term effect is that no-one is responsible or accountable.

Your incident manager must have enough authority to be able to go to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level support and to your third party suppliers and insist on incident resolution within SLA times. On a small Service Desk this is not a fulltime job, but something that does need to be done on a daily basis. If requests are separated from incidents and incidents are closed as soon as your customer is able to work you should not have a large backlog to deal with.

## Communication is King!

Your Service Desk and, more specifically, your Incident Management process are where your customer service is measured. 90% of your customer communications will be related to Incidents and requests, pre-empting customer calls requesting updates by sending out regular updates will greatly improve your customer satisfaction. Of course there is a balancing act, listen to what your customers tell you and tailor your communication strategy to suit their needs.

Communication is probably the quickest win you can get from the implementation of an Incident Management Process, and it is easy and can be achieved with little or no additional cost. Service

Desk tools will all be able to automate, to some extent, these customer communications, making your life a lot easier, and your customers a lot happier.

*This has just been a very brief introduction to Incident Management, if you would like more information contact one of our consultant at [consultancy@versosolutions.com](mailto:consultancy@versosolutions.com)*

## References:

- (1) Service Operation © Crown Copyright 2007 – Authors: Sharon Taylor (Chief Architect ITIL® V3), David Cannon and David Wheeldon.