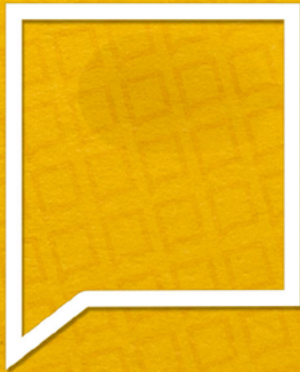# STREAMLINING IT SERVICE DESK INCIDENT MANAGEMENT:

3 Process Changes To Make Now

On an IT service desk, incident management can derail in several places, slowing response times while increasing downtime and impacting revenue and productivity.

To improve response times, you need to know where your process is most likely to break down, how to identify the causes and how to create effective processes for your IT service desk.

While communication is a critical component of incident management, IT service desk managers must also have a well-defined process in place to best serve their organizations.

Implementing the right process – with an emphasis on providing the correct training and tools – helps IT service desks respond to incidents more efficiently and generate a proven return on investment (ROI).

Why A Mature IT Service Desk Isn't Static

How an IT service desk operates generally depends on experience levels. On a service desk just getting established, expect to see more effort spent on call logging, initial analysis and attempted resolutions, with many calls passed on to the second line.

The IT service desk manager is focused on getting information into the system. As a result, an inexperienced service desk often struggles with:

- **Problem management**
- **First-line resolution**
- **Interaction between first line and second/third lines**

More mature service desks have efficient processes in place. As repetition kicks in, knowledge builds. Much like in manufacturing, numbers play a vital role in decision-making, as areas like length of calls and resolution times get measured.

Interaction among IT team members and throughout the business also improves. As first-line resolutions increase, fewer issues go to the second and third line, freeing up these more specialized resources to focus on being proactive and addressing root causes.

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In a tiered support system, you want each line aligned as follows:

Zero Line

This is for your automated services, such as a password change. While automation can save time and money, avoid automating too many services.

First Line

This line fields all the service desk calls and is the front line of defense for the organization. It is all about getting the business up and running again by finding workarounds to issues. It usually consists of junior-level people who aspire to become specialized.

Second And Third Lines

This is where you'll have your specialized resources. The second line is usually comprised of administrators, while the third line is most specialized and has your systems architects. They are called in to help on complex problems the first line can't resolve.

When an IT service desk is static, it becomes a help desk, which is more about call logging and getting back to clients. **A service desk is about servicing and applying knowledge to help clients as quickly as possible.**

Service desks should have robust first-line resolution that goes beyond call logging. This allows your team to spend more time diagnosing issues, doing project management and developing solutions that help the business run smoother.

An IT service desk receives a lot of lower-level issues, like password resets. On an average day, such issues can account for 80% of the incidents, so it's important to build up the appropriate responses and have the right tool sets to solve these issues. The quicker you do so, the more efficient the service desk can be.

That's why process is so important. A strong IT service desk isn't just a first line being badgered with calls all day. As an IT service desk manager, you bring value to the business by improving IT performance across the organization. Having the right process gives you the time to work on those higher-level, valuable tasks.

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How To Solve Common IT Service Management Challenges

To streamline IT service desk incident management, make process changes in three areas:

1 Conduct A Gap Analysis

Procedures underlie everything on an IT service desk. It's critical to continuously analyze processes to see where issues and gaps exist.

Triage tends to be the most common issue, with the wrong person on the desk getting a call. This represents the lowest IT complexity but the highest scenario complexity.

Another common issue is when a gap exists between the initial diagnosis of an issue and the actual root cause. A mature, process-driven IT service desk is best equipped to pinpoint early on if an issue may be a serious problem that could have a widespread impact on the organization.

For example, if you receive three calls about the same issue, your IT service desk should be able to quickly pinpoint that the calls are related. You don't want to wait until the issue has spread throughout the business.

Use metrics to help you crunch the numbers and identify potential problem areas. Almost everything associated with an IT service desk is measurable, including:

- **Number of calls received per day**
- **Average length of call**
- **First-line resolution rate**

Compare your numbers to industry standards, but don't go too far. What's most important is that your numbers match your business goals and objectives. You want to grow in a coordinated manner.

Since everything is so measurable, it's tempting to go overboard when looking at metrics. While the numbers do matter, **humans are at the root of IT service desk management.**

2 Provide The Right Training

Because people ultimately determine the success of an IT service desk, you need a training process. The work is highly varied, and a good service desk requires a blend of technical, business and soft skills.

As an IT service desk manager, it's important to develop staff in different ways. You may want to move people around to match their skills with the right position on the service desk.

In general, you'll have highly skilled IT team members on the second and third lines. Their primary focus is root cause analysis of issues and process improvement, in addition to IT maintenance work as needed.

People on the first line are typically young and early in their careers. Avoid the temptation to be too protectionist with these team members. Attrition rates are usually high here, because some people naturally choose to change careers or seek work opportunities elsewhere.

Some first-line employees, however, will love the work and the broad range of skills they develop. You should nurture and grow such team members, as their communication skills in particular can play a key role in bridging the gap between the business and IT.

First-line team members do require some technical training. Although these people don't need detailed knowledge of databases, they should understand how a database functions and the way it relates to the bigger IT picture. They also must know how issues impact the organization, so they can accurately judge the severity.

Especially when it comes to first-line employees, management may deem investing in training to be too expensive and unnecessary. **That's a big mistake, because these team members are highly valuable to the organization.**

You shouldn't try to take a manufacturing approach to training, as IT service management has too many complex people-related challenges for a rigid training protocol to be successful. However, you do need training and resource planning to build a strong IT service desk.

3 **Implement Technology**

Without the right tools, your IT service desk won't progress – it'll merely function as a call center. Today's tools are sophisticated and can be overly complex, so look for technology that mirrors the maturity of your service desk.

You want an IT alerting system that easily integrates with your service desk solution. The key is that incident management is as efficient as possible within the system. In addition, look for these features in any technology you're considering:

- **Targeted alerts:** Alert the person or team that can take action to resolve the issue. This helps to avoid "alert fatigue" and reduces the chance an alert will be missed with general, team-wide notifications.
- **Auto-escalations:** Resolve IT issues faster by ensuring no time is wasted assigning the issue to the team that can fix it. If a resource doesn't pick up the ticket, the incident alert goes to another team member until it's picked up.
- **Off-network alerts:** Have confidence that you can always communicate with your organization. Reach people with alerts on multiple channels, including email, text, voice call, fax, mobile app push notifications and pages.

Once you have the right technology to search for information, identify clients, see relationships and configure management databases, your service desk can mature.

Process-centric tools tied to IT service management frameworks such as ITIL are sensitive to the entire service desk structure. Ultimately, that's what you want in service desk technology – workflow-based tools that are scalable with your organization.

The Role Of Communication In IT Service Management Process Improvement

Communication plays a vital role in incident management. Having a process for streamlined communication ensures a clear, concise message is shared with the organization.

Incident management is highly process driven, because you need quick response times. Your service desk tools and related technology must support communication within the organization.

IT is usually communicating with three groups:

- **Internal IT support team**
- **Business owners and employees**
- **Customers**

You should have a structured communications channel that's built on identifying the right stakeholders, determining the best medium to reach them and choosing the frequency of communication based on the severity of the incident.

As the IT service desk manager, you're generally responsible for front-line communication, which includes customer complaints. Often, the business owner who oversees client relationships will communicate with them, but may need technical information from the service desk to address the issue.

Specialized experts on the third line handle the more complicated maintenance and design of your technology systems. It's essential that the correct information is available, including any initial dialogue, feedback from the client and attempts to resolve the issue.

When your third-line team members go to pick up the phone and ask questions, they should already have a solid foundation of information. **This allows the IT service desk to respond to issues more quickly.**

Using Process To Demonstrate Value And Prove ROI

Since you're responsible for reporting to senior management on the performance of the service desk, you need to show return on investment (ROI). Management wants to see numbers demonstrating the value your team provides the organization.

Taking a process-driven approach to incident management (with the appropriate use of metrics) is the best way to improve response times and lower downtime – two areas critical to the success of any business.

By proving ROI, you're in the best position to grow resources. And when managed properly, as the cost of the IT service desk increases, so does the savings to the organization.

With the right process in place, you can have an IT service desk that's effective, efficient and valuable to the organization as a whole.

As the cost of the IT service desk increases, so does the savings to the organization

Want to learn more about improving your organization's IT alerting?

Watch our webinar featuring alerting and communications expert Jeff Trask.

Watch The Webinar

About the author

John Degura is an experienced business and IT professional with a demonstrated history of working in the information technology and services industry.

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