

Is ITIL right for your help desk?

It's a great place to start if you're having help desk frustrations

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Need help with the help desk?

If you ask an IT manager what one of their biggest concerns is, more often than not, the help desk is on that list. Why? Competing standards, poor process integration, improper selection and use of tools, the list goes on. Having issues in the help desk can cause frustrations within the IT department as well as challenge IT's relationship with the business.

There are numerous symptoms to your help desk problems, most notably your current solution cannot manage the information the way you need it, key metrics are seldom collected or reported, or you have no control or visibility of critical changes in the system or the trouble tickets they are producing.

Enter ITIL

The IT industry has numerous organizations, consultants, software platforms, and experts. Maybe that's the problem...too many competing standards. So what's an IT manager to do? Pick one standard as your starting point and go with it. At Escoute Consulting, we recommend the IT Infrastructure Library.

One thing that many successful IT organizations realize is that no one standard will give you everything you need. More and more organizations are adopting the concepts set forth in the IT Infrastructure Library, or ITIL, which puts a framework around IT practices and aligns them with business strategy. ITIL, has begun to take root in today's IT shops and is raising eyebrows in executive boardrooms. Developed by the United Kingdom's Office of Government Commerce (OGC), ITIL is currently the only comprehensive, non-proprietary, publicly available guidance for IT Service Management (ITSM). ITIL describes an integrated, process based, best practice framework for managing IT services and has become a world-wide de facto standard in Service Management. ITIL compliant practices efficiently deliver quality cost conscience IT services that your business expects. In simple terms, ITIL helps your IT shop provide better service to the business.

A typical misconception to be aware of is that ITIL does not certify solutions or products as "ITIL-compliant." Software tools are "certified." ITIL-certification is for individuals. When evaluating if ITIL is right for your organization, keep in mind that the use of an application is only as good as the way the individual company understands and puts ITIL to work.

ITIL and the Service Desk

Although most organizations fondly call this service the "Help Desk," the official ITIL term for this function is called the Service Desk. Call it what you want, the Service Desk is typically the face of IT, and the business sees this as the portal that links them to their IT counterparts. Organizations

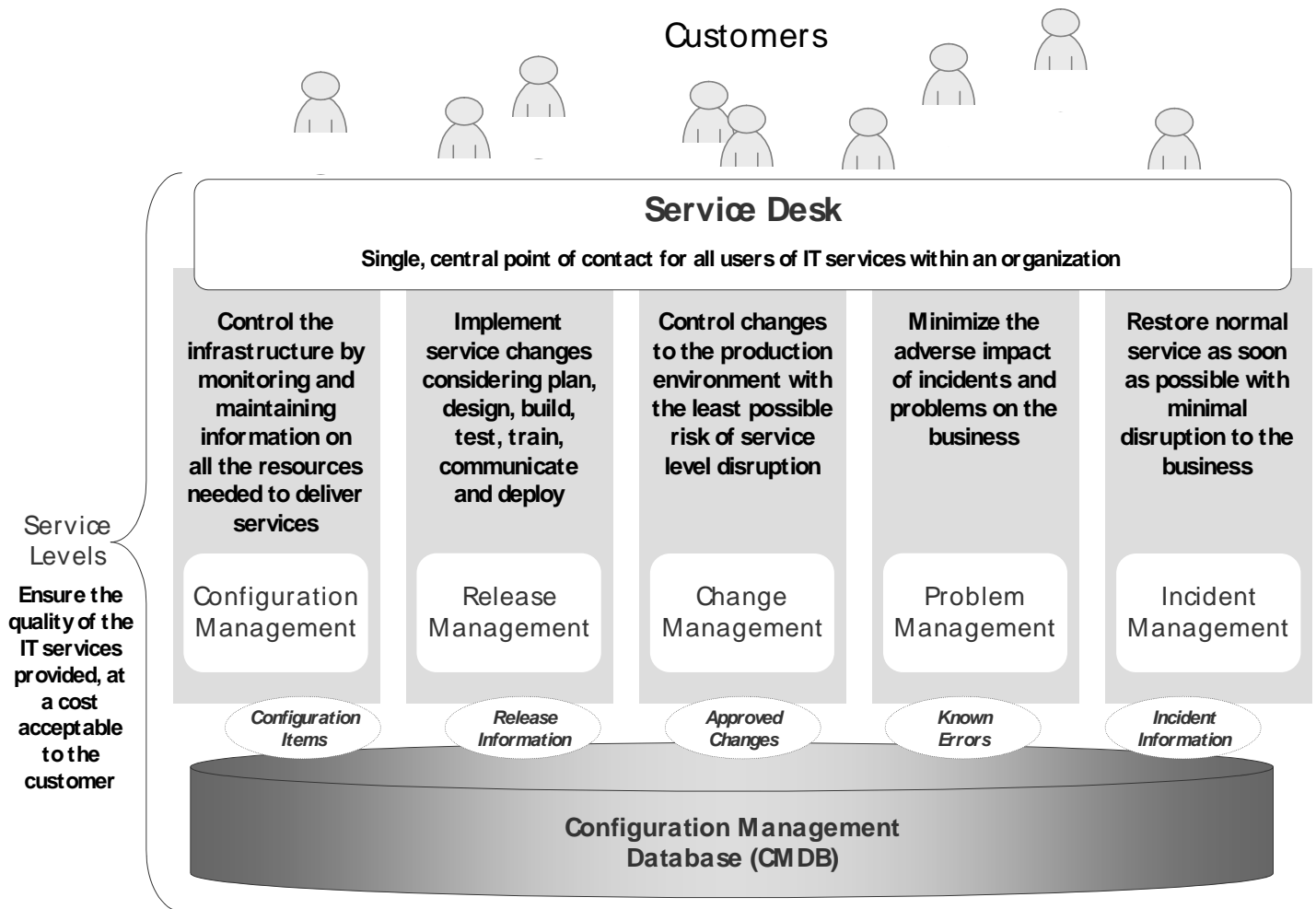
depend on this function to communicate with IT, and furthermore, provide valuable feedback to IT management. Whether you know it or not, Service Desk staff are in large part ambassadors. For companies who do satisfaction surveys, the results are mostly focused on Service Desk activities; therefore, efforts towards continuously improving this function are paramount.

So many organizations today are realizing the benefits of moving their Service Desk function towards the ITIL framework. According to Robert Scarbrough, VP of IT for Swope Community Enterprises in Kansas City, "Implementing ITIL-based processes for our enterprise help desk increased our operating efficiency by over 30%."

There are many other inter-related processes that contribute to the model (see figure below). Of course, ITIL covers more than just the Service Desk, it is an integrated set of processes designed to help IT run better.

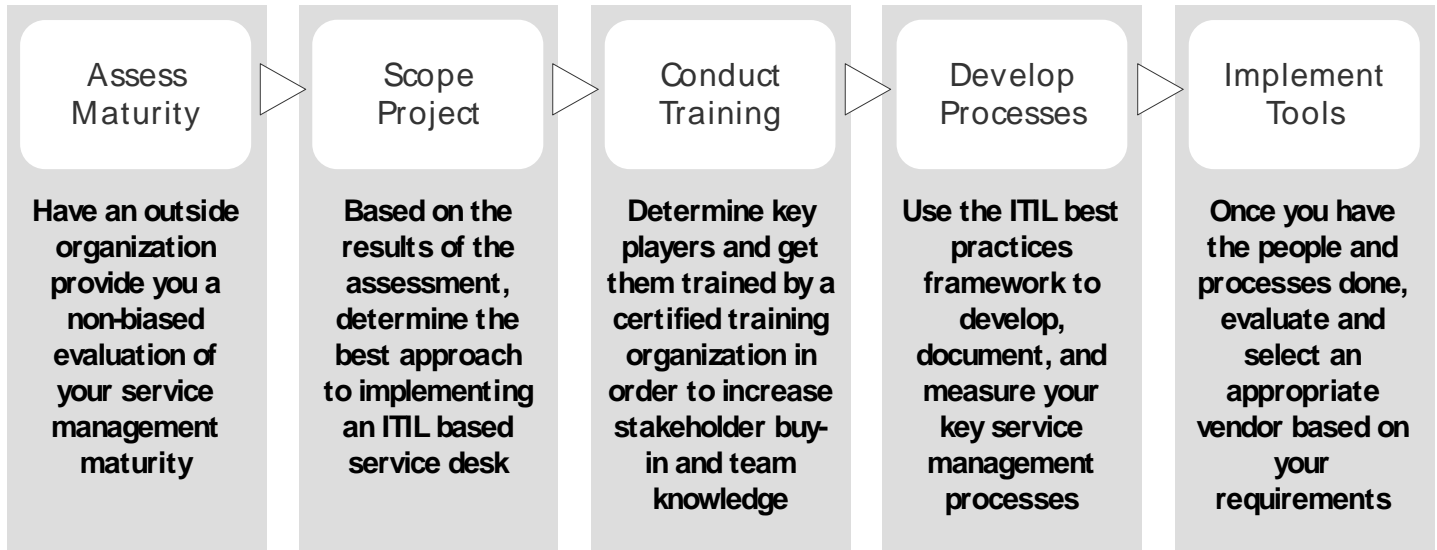
What comes first?

As many will often tell you, a successful help desk project should not start by purchasing the latest software (there have been rumblings that companies are a little wary of vendors who tout that their solutions are the panacea of ITIL compliant processes). Consider process first, then technology. In addition to your processes, make sure you understand what services you provide your customers...design a service catalog that accurately reflects the services you provide, and not the technology you administer.



The Service Desk integrates with multiple processes in the IT organization.

Use a proven methodology using industry best practices when implementing your Service Desk based on ITIL fundamentals.



Once you've answered the critical question of how your service management processes fit into your organization, and more importantly, how your service desk communicates with your customers, then you can begin selecting an appropriate tool.

What about those Best Practices?

Escoute Consulting has developed a quick and useful list of the seven critical best practices we've seen in our various client engagements, these include:

1. Start with process, don't think that a help desk tool will solve IT problems that should be addressed with a process
2. Use a knowledge database that can harvest the knowledge that your Service Desk collects
3. Get stakeholder buy-in early in the process and include them in the communication plan
4. Develop, report, and act on Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

5. Train staff on ITIL foundations early to assist in organizational buy-in.
6. Avoid homegrown help desk solutions. They can get expensive and depend heavily on the knowledge of the designer.
7. In planning an implementation, develop scenarios that follow various types of incidents all the way from initial call through solution and documentation, and how an incident will be escalated if it can't be resolved on the first call

Need help?

Don't hesitate to ask for outside assistance. Many consulting organizations offer excellent advice at competitive rates. Escoute Consulting provides premiere IT Service Management consulting services. We are not constrained by various vendor agreements and alliances - we are truly independent and objective. We are trained in the ITIL best practices framework and use ITIL as a guide to helping you solve your technical challenges.

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