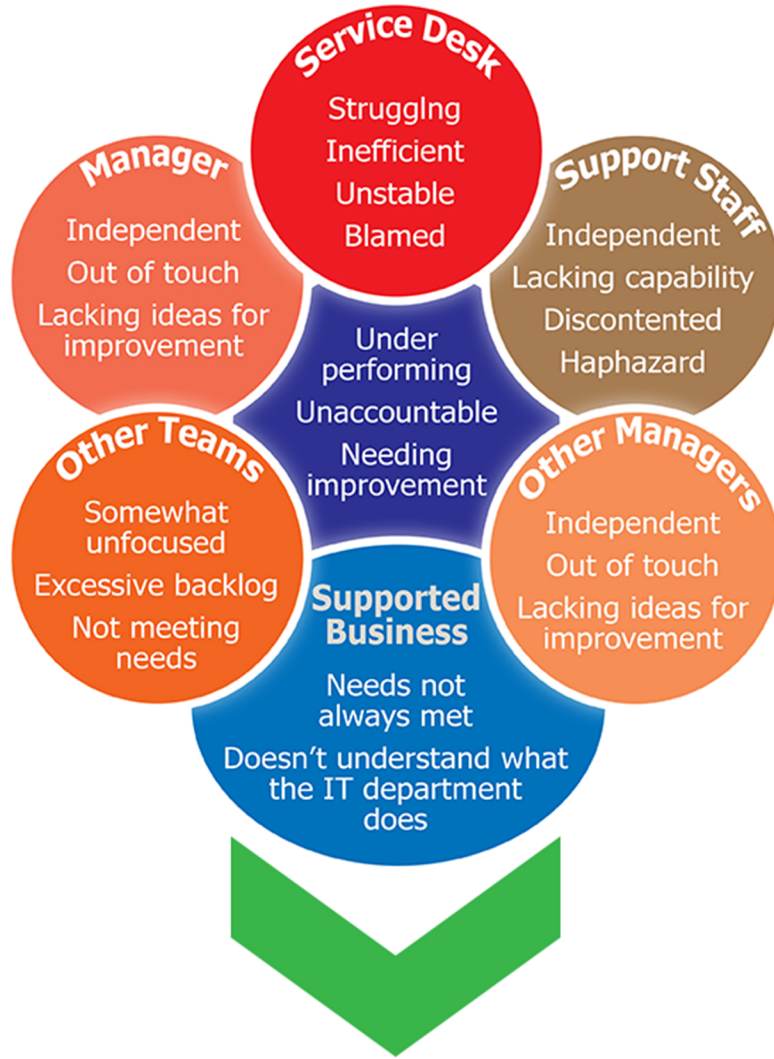


If you want "Big Difference" Service Improvement, ITIL is not enough

Does your current situation look something like this?



Where you want to be



If you want "Big Difference" Service Improvement, ITIL is not enough

Note: this article's context is in relation to an organisation's internal end-user support, including Request Fulfilment.

It's a commonly held belief that implementing a Resolution based SLA will lead to improved service delivery. Beware though, it's very difficult to make work and if you can make it work, it's usually expensive to run and won't make a big difference to how support work is handled overall. Perhaps most importantly though, the SLA period is usually unrealistically long.

It's very difficult to make work because on-hold periods must be considered, but if using a Service Management tool's timer suspension feature, it's almost impossible for data to be accurate enough to have any relevance or meaning.

It's expensive to run because ordinarily, you need an Incident Manager, otherwise there will be no control over SLA breaches.

Even then, this role might be lost from a budget cut,

This is an even bigger risk to the Resolution SLA. You need to plan very carefully for this, otherwise its implementation will be pointless.

likely resulting in the SLA failing. For this reason, when applied to Incident Management, ITIL's Service Level Management process just isn't practical for many organisations unless an exceptional Incident Management process can be introduced.

If you have an Incident Manager - or a great process - and you're somehow managing to achieve data accuracy, even then the Resolution SLA won't make a big difference because it only affects the service provided for a minority of service tickets and only at the point a customer has been waiting for quite a long time already. Typically, this might be for up to only 20% of support tickets once they're already nearly three days old. Does this really make sense when so much can go wrong in the meantime, especially considering it doesn't usually take nearly three days to complete a job?

Well, it would certainly be better to focus on everything that can go wrong. Then, if every required action can be controlled, ensuring it happens in a reasonable time, fewer service tickets will breach and possibly without the need for an Incident Manager. That will make a big difference.

If managing workload in this way also effortlessly ensures data accuracy and automatically maintains open ticket volume to a minimum, an even bigger difference is made.

Performance metrics will be transformed, from a position of being pointless, to being accurate, meaningful and with purpose, illustrating how much service has improved. These are the things a big difference approach would bring.

So, what's needed to develop a process like this?

The one and only thing customers really care about is for their need to be dealt with as quickly as possible. Everything in ITIL should positively influence Service Operation, but the only components that might affect service speed and reliability are prioritisation and the Resolution SLA, so we'll continue to focus only on these. Incident Models, Knowledge Management, Problem and Change Management also directly affect frontline service delivery, but don't affect general timeliness.

The Resolution SLA should be at the heart of operations. The question is, therefore, what can be done to overcome its problems? Then, what can be done to control every required support action?

This very important topic is discussed more fully in my article "What's wrong with the Resolution SLA?", found at optimise.com/resolutionsla, but I'll provide some background here.

It's necessary foremost to recognise that ITIL only touches the surface, giving you a structure for what the framework says you should consider and have but nothing ground-breaking in detail of what you should do.

So, instead of simply implementing ITIL at face value, you need to strategise and design your own processes as best you can, based on the ITIL components that make practical sense for adoption in your organisation at the time but focused on identified problems and inefficiencies. Doing so is very ITIL-centric, but for success, ITIL adoption isn't in fact necessary.

Recent HDI research has shown that only 69% of high maturity IT organisations regard themselves as being ITIL adopters, probably because they have found their own way that no longer resembles ITIL alone. Poignantly, this is a lower level of ITIL adoption than seen in low maturity organisations.

Perhaps some of these companies have found the big difference factors I'm talking about. I just don't know.

What I do know though is that a great internally developed Incident Management process, one that streamlines operations to the extent that all support work is dealt with as quickly as possible, would guide and drive operatives from task to task, so your support teams become almost self-managing. A great Incident Management process would reduce, not increase, your required headcount and would be so developed it wouldn't closely resemble ITIL's Incident Management process.

For a Managed Service Provider, these advantages would be golden. For an IT department, it would mean a solid, lean and agile bedrock for operations at last.

The problem though is finding someone, or a team, who sees what's needed to achieve it.

A big difference methodology is by no means obvious. In fact, organisations are usually slow at introducing any kind of service improvement initiative and any that are brought forward are very unlikely to have a big impact on overall service delivery.

So, the quality of support provision tends to continue as it always has, muddling-along in a natural, uncontrolled, somewhat haphazard manner.

Having process owners and a service improvement register will probably make no noticeable difference. Furthermore, time-based metrics will probably remain inadequate, often leaving managers having to waste time producing reports that are pointless from having no meaning.

Basically, if you can't get far beyond face value implementation of ITIL's Service Level Management and Incident Management processes, things don't get any better at all. You need big difference factors.

Big difference factors are:

- A structured approach to work handling that goes far deeper than ITIL.
- Motivators and personal performance management.
- Reliance on teams; less so on individuals and managers.
- Detailed operational overview and insight, empowering the ability to manage by exception.

Key outcomes and success factors would be:

- Timeliness and reliability.
- Demonstrably high levels of support ticket activity.
- Service knowledge and operational control.

Crucially, they rely heavily on smart Dashboard capabilities found only in modern, leading ITSM tools.

What's wrong with the Resolution SLA?

IT Managers often don't fully recognise the Resolution SLA's problems and the kind of thing that can be done to straighten-out this key performance measure.

I've written an article dedicated to the subject of prioritisation and the Resolution SLA, drawing on how big difference factors can fit in to achieve the transformation you're after. If you've found this article interesting, please take a read. It's found at www.opimise.com/resolutionsla.

About the author

David Stewart BA (Hons) works to a methodology, called the Service Focus Framework, that he has developed through experience built up over more than twenty years with many organisations.

David offers a free, bespoke Service Improvement Report to interested organisations. This can be requested through his web site at www.opimise.com.

David's web site is www.opimise.com

The follow-on article "What's Wrong with the Resolution SLA" can be found at:

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