



What is Incident Management?

ITIL begins by defining an incident as:

... any event which is not part of the standard operation of a service and which causes, or may cause, an interruption to, or a reduction in, the quality of that service.

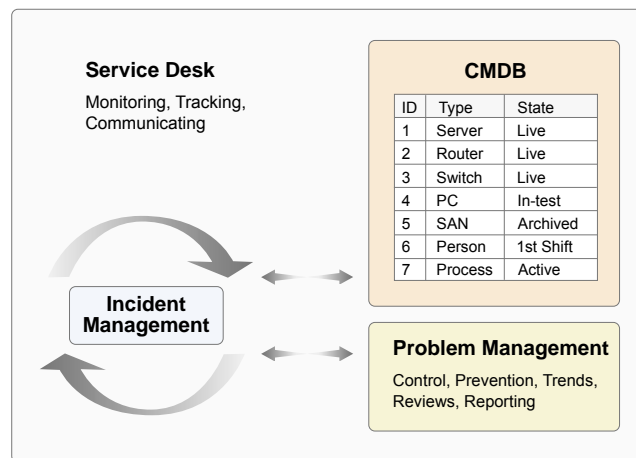
ITIL then goes on to develop a working definition for Incident Management by describing its goal:

... to restore normal service operation as quickly as possible, and minimize the adverse impact on business operations, thus ensuring that the best possible levels of service quality and availability are maintained.

It is important to keep the second definition in mind to avoid confusing Incident Management with Problem Management. The former is primarily concerned with speed and restoring services to the user as quickly as possible. This will often take the form of a workaround when an unknown error is encountered. Problem Management, on the other hand, is more focused on the identification of root causes and may involve lengthy investigation or analysis. Further confusing the distinction between these two is the fact that many of the underlying processes are similar and handled by yet another Discipline, the Service Desk, which is responsible for monitoring, tracking, and communicating. Finally, there is the need for both Incident and Problem Management to interact with Configuration Items (CIs) in the Configuration Management Database (CMDB). These high level interactions are illustrated in the diagram below.

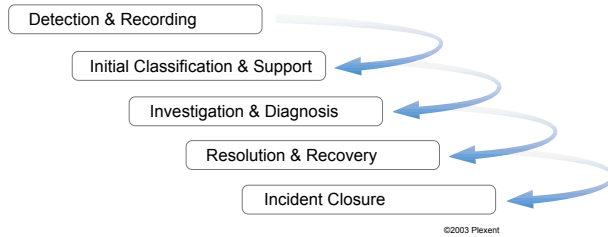
Looking more closely at the processes within Incident Management, they can be viewed as groups of activities necessary to move the incident through a lifecycle. As depicted in the diagram on the next page, there are five main groups. What is not shown, however, is that often an incident will not advance cleanly through these groups in serial fashion. For example, Initial Classification may only be able to determine that the event which caused an incident does not match any known error in the Problem Management knowledge base. At this point Support may offer the user a workaround, such as providing a new system, while the incident is transferred to Problem Management for resolution. The incident continues to be monitored and tracked until it is returned to Incident Management where a fix is applied and the lifecycle concludes with Incident Closure.

Because it is vital to make efficient use of the often scarce



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Incident Lifecycle



and highly specialized resources necessary to bring incidents to closure, Classification is a key step. When done correctly, incidents are categorized by Type with Impact, Urgency, and Priority evaluated to determine ownership. Although the initial classification may change based on identification of the root cause, it is important to maintain continuity throughout the lifecycle to assist with status, escalation, and priority changes.

In the previous example, the user most likely only reported symptoms to the Service Desk. Because these did not match a known error, a decision to replace the entire system was made so the user could maintain productivity. When turned over to Problem Management, it might be determined that the network and not the user's system was cause of the error, changing the classification from "hardware" to "network." However, during this process when the user calls for a status update, the original classification should be used so Service Desk personnel speak to the "hardware problem" and not confuse the issue by discussing "the network."

Inability to correctly classify and assign ownership of incidents are only two of the many factors which can negatively impact Service Levels when Incident Management is not included as part of an organization's Service Management program. Inability to monitor and manage incidents, inability to employ existing solutions, and poor customer service can also result. Fortunately, Plexent and itDNA can help you avoid these scenarios.

The Plexent Approach

itDNA builds on the Incident Management concepts outlined in the ITIL standard and, by leveraging our framework, Plexent can apply ITIL to your organization. If you are just getting started with Incident Management you may need help tying it into your Service Desk to handle the customer interaction or into Change Management to query and update CIs within the CMDB. Mature organizations may need assistance to tightly integrate Incident

Management with Problem Management to better utilize the specialized resources assigned to provide n-Tier support. No matter your Incident Management maturity, Plexent can take you to the next level by bringing all of the pieces together.

Much more than just a framework, itDNA brings real-world tools and techniques to bear on your concerns. Backed up by itDNA's maturity models and rich, intellectual property knowledge base, Plexent's project management combines with proven policies and procedures to provide standardized services within the following Incident Management Elements:

- Desktop Support
- Server Support
- Network Support
- Database Support
- Messaging Support

In addition to the Disciplines already mentioned, Incident Management also interacts with Change and Release Management. When functioning as part of a healthy Service Improvement Program (SIP), Incident Management contributes to effective monitoring and management across the Disciplines. It also helps leverage to the maximum extent possible the effort already put into developing solutions. Information in the knowledge base can be reused, saving the expense of having to "reinvent the wheel" each time an error appears. Other benefits of a mature Incident Management program include:

- Reduced costs
- Increased productivity
- Improved service
- Faster resolution of issues

Incident Management provides the first line of defense against events interrupting or reducing service in your organization. Through the facilitation provided by the Service Desk, Incident Management is also the user's window into the activity taken on their behalf to reestablish or maintain the services they need to conduct business. Rather than standing alone, Incident Management functions best when tightly integrated with other Disciplines. To help you evaluate the necessary linkages in your organization, Plexent provides assessment services. Leveraging the intelligence in our itDNA, we can help you evaluate where you are today, where you would like to take your organization, and the surest path to get there.

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