

IS THE SERVICE DESK A SERVICE AND SHOULD IT BE INCLUDED IN THE SERVICE CATALOGUE?

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Deciding if the Service Desk is a service is based on your perspective and IT strategy.

ITIL® states that the Service Desk is a function. As such it is a means to an end. It “provides a point of communication to Users and a point of coordination for several IT Groups and Processes (Service Operations, 2011, p.22). Moreover, since Users cannot order a “Service Desk” it is easy to argue that it is not a service.

Likewise, in most organizations, the Service Desk is like the reception desk of a hotel. Using the reception or front desk is an integral part of consuming the service of the hotel stay since checking-in is required to use the service. The fact that some hotels have self-service check-in and check-out supports the fact that it is a function. The service is the room rental. The hotel reception is a means to an end.

However, some organizations not only use the Service Desk as a function but also offer its services to other groups. For example, some act as a point-of-contact for Building Maintenance to report burnt lights or defective doors. In other cases the Service Desk provides first level support for the Application Development group, so that it does not have to setup its own point-of-contact and support processes. Both examples meet the definition of a service which is: “A means of delivering value to Customers by facilitating outcomes Customers want to achieve without the ownership of specific costs and risks” (Service Operations, 2011, p.339). In these examples, the Customers are the Building Maintenance Team and the Application Development group.

These examples align to the definition of a service. ITIL® Service Strategy mentions that value consists of utility and warranty. For the Service Desk, utility is having the right mix of: business hours (e.g. 9 to 5, 24x7, follow-the-sun), linguistic capabilities, cost structure, types of services (e.g. onsite service, service counter for walkups, self-service), skill level (e.g. technical service desk or call-logging service), etc. The warranty means that it has enough infrastructure and staff to meet its SLA. Moreover, the Service Desk has many attributes of a service like:

- An owner and a manager.
- A cost model.
- Charge back models for its use.
- A capacity plan.
- Performance measures.
- An SLA.

In addition, ITIL® processes can be used to manage the service called “Service Desk.” Here are some examples.

ITIL Process	Example of applicability to the Service Desk
Availability	Methods to ensure that it is available when the business needs it, such as an overflow line or self-service.
Demand Management	Charge back, self-service, policies to limit the duration of calls.
Capacity Management	Welcome message in the telephone queue to increase wait time to reduce call overflow and abandons (i.e. drop calls).

Financial Management	Budget, accounting, costing and charge back models.
Service Level Management	Support Levels like Bronze, Silver, Gold.
IT Service Continuity Management	Business Impact Analysis and Business Continuity Plan.

Therefore, depending on your organization’s IT strategy, the Service Desk can be one of the following or a combination of:

1. Function.
2. Service offered to the business (i.e. Business Service).
3. Internal service offered to IT groups.

With this in mind, the same conversation can be held regarding the Network Operations Control (NOC) or, as ITIL® v3 calls it, the IT operations control function. Do we offer it as a service internally to IT groups or to our customers?

While this discussion may be ongoing a more immediate decision is often required regarding the inclusion of the Service Desk in the Service Catalogue.

If the Catalogue discussed is the Catalogue of User Services, it must at a minimum provide information on how to contact the Service Desk. Thus, the Service Desk should be mentioned regardless if the organization considers the Service Desk a function or a service.

When the Catalogue discussed is a Catalogue of services offered to customers then the Service Desk should be included when the organization offers a Service Desk “service.” In other words, customers can “order/buy” the service of a Service Desk instead of setting up their own function. On the other hand, when the Service Desk is a means-to-an-end as discussed previously it should not be included as a service offered to customers.

However, it is important to realize that even though IT may not offer the Service Desk “service” to its customers, the Service Desk can still be a service offered internally within I.T. to operational groups. In this case, the Service Desk service should at least be included in the Service Portfolio as it ensures that it is taken into consideration during strategy discussions and decisions which may affect its fit-for-purpose.

About the Author:



Denis Matte has over 20 years of IT experience in the private and public sector. As a consultant he helped organizations implement ITSM integrated toolsets and ITIL based processes by designing and managing projects at the operational, tactical and strategic levels. He currently manages the ITSM team in a public organization that administers the ITSM tool and helps internal groups progress in ITIL and ITSM. Denis Matte is a certified ITIL Expert, Project Manager and Technical

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