The Basics of ITIL Help Desk for SMB's

This three-step process will provide you the information necessary to understand ITIL, help you write your strategic IT plan and develop the implementation plan for incident and problem management.

Written by John McDonald
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INTRODUCTION

ITIL, the Information Technology Infrastructure Library, is a set of concepts and practices for IT Service Management. It was developed for the UK Government.

ITIL has existed for many years but, as a small or medium sized business (SMB) it may be difficult to distill it into a usable form for your business.

You can get more information about ITIL from the ITIL Official Website. http://www.itil-officialsite.com/

This e-book is arranged in sequence from the first action through to the last with the intent of helping to implement an IT Help Desk. We recommend following the sequence to get the result.

This e-book is suited to small and medium sized businesses with help desks of 5 to 20 staff and IT departments between 10 and 100 staff.

The ITIL process consists of strategy, incident management, problem management, feedback and change.

There are parts of the ITIL process this document does not address. We will focus on strategy, incident management and problem management. Feedback and change processes can be added later once you have the basics complete and working.

The processes we are focusing on are:

1. Understand why an IT strategic plan is important to the process and the definition of strategy, and tactics.

2. Reviewing the information required to develop the IT Strategic Plan.

3. Reviewing incident management and problem management and planning how to implement them.

THE ITIL PROCESS

1. Strategy process
2. Incident management process
3. Problem management process
4. Feedback process
5. Change process

For an SMB organization that has the goal of implementing ITIL we will focus on processes one through three. The feedback and change processes are dependent upon having good working incident and problem management processes and are be considered good phase two and three projects.

THE IT STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan should provide the team a framework for decision making and a foundation for excellent, continually improving service.

A strategy is the first step to maturing an IT team.

To develop a strategy a goal must be defined or known.

We will operate on the assumption that the goal is the implementation of ITIL incident and problem management system.
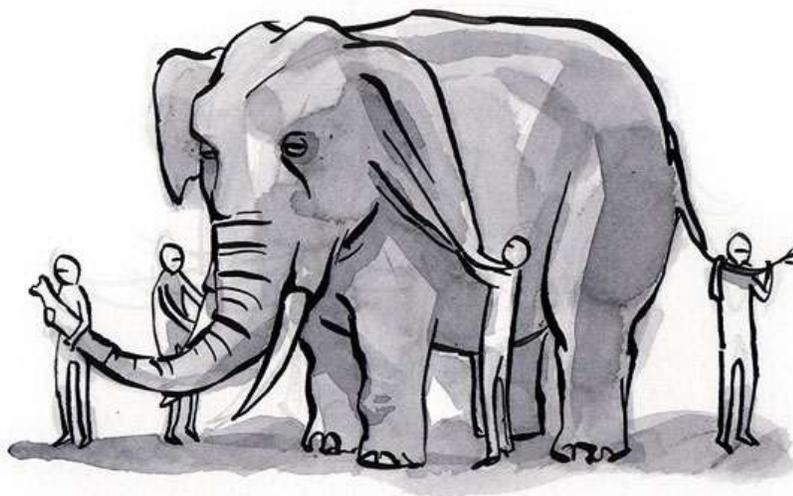
Definitions:

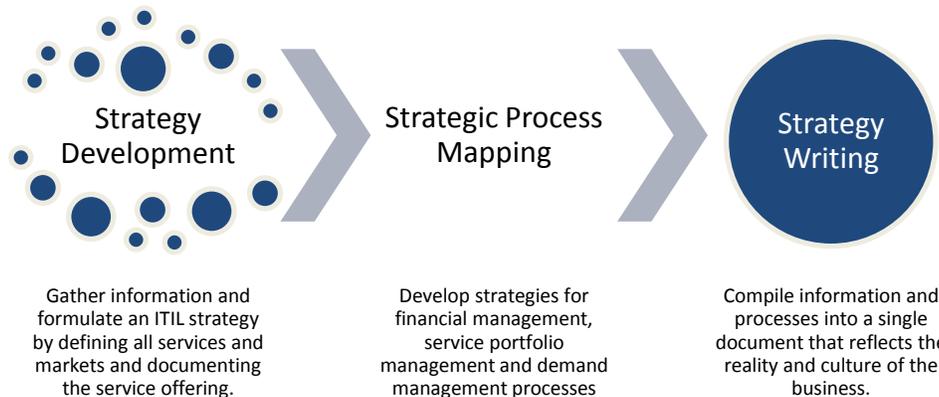**Strategy** - A plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim.

Tactics - An action carefully planned to achieve a specific end.

Service – any capability, resource or product of a service provider.

Why is the service strategy important?

The Service Strategy will provide direction on how all services are managed through the incident management and problem management processes. Without a strategy component the ITIL project will be missing many, important processes which make the implementation possible.

ITIL Help Desk Strategy Process

Strategy Development	Strategic Process Mapping	Strategy Writing
Gather information and formulate an ITIL strategy by defining all services and markets and documenting the service offering.	Develop strategies for financial management, service portfolio management and demand management processes	Compile information and processes into a single document that reflects the reality and culture of the business.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Gather information required to formulate an ITIL strategy by defining all services and customer types, (markets), and documenting the service offering.

Gathering the required information will require the identification and documentation of every service the organization currently has, the planned services, and services to be decommissioned.

1. **Services Listing:** Develop a list of services to use throughout this project. During this project the services list will grow with other dimensions that could include, market, value, provider, etc. Use the service documentation form in the appendix to facilitate listing the services.

Gather additional information by interviewing / surveying your customers (markets) to understand how they use the services, the critical nature of the service and any additional details. If these service dimensions do not exist in the service documentation form then add them.

2. **Market definition:** Work with departmental (market) peers to understand their needs and evaluate the services. Together, determine which services are required / not required. Add the additional service data to the service documentation forms.

Finally, you will require a firm understanding of how the services satisfy the business's needs.

3. **Offering development:** Work with the customers (markets) and develop strategies that will satisfy their business need; align IT with market goals and objectives with the ITIL Strategy. Add any additional data to the service documentation forms.

DEVELOPING A SERVICE PROCESS STRATEGY

Develop strategies for financial management, service portfolio management and demand management processes by defining how to provide services and information to the rest of the organization.

PROCESS 1 – FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Gather the financial policies that affect the delivery of IT Services. Policies and processes around acquisition, payroll, hiring, and reporting likely exist and should be attained. Understand the requirement for budgeting, resource reporting or any other reporting that may be required of IT and document those requirements.

IT Management information may be required that is outside of the Finance department's domain. Understand these requirements and document them.

Sound financial strategies will aid managing resources and budgets. You may ask:

- How will the assets and resources of the IT department be managed?
- How will others be required to think about assets and resources when decisions are required?
- How will IT account for assets and resources?
- Do other departments require information from IT that will impact the achievement of their goals and strategies?
- What type of financial information is required by management to make decisions about the project portfolio, assets and resources? How can the information be delivered effectively, routinely?

The documented financial processes should include delivery of the required financial information to finance, IT management and others. The strategy could look something like this:

PROCESS 2 – SERVICE PORTFOLIO

The service portfolio is the sum of all the services and products delivered to the customers.

Customers measure success by how well the service portfolio is managed.

Develop generic processes that will satisfy the needs of the service portfolio. Consider the following:

- How will a service request be approved or disapproved once received?
- How will the list of services be managed?
- What reporting requirements need to be fulfilled?
- What happens when a service comes up for renewal? Most software today renews annually and how they are renewed can make a big difference to a small company.

- How are services deployed? Is an informal approach OK or is a defined process required? Document this strategy and use it for deployment. You may also apply a similar policy to decommissioning a service.
- How will a service be rationalized? Why should money be spent on it? Is there an ROI? Is it a business requirement, law of the land, nice to have?
- Discuss Service Level Agreements[1] with customers during the service definition and offering stage of the Strategy Development process.   What are the service level agreements? (Keep it to a minimum (2 or 3))

Use this chart to develop a strategy that will satisfy the needs of each service in the service portfolio.

Strategy component	Strategy
Service requests	i.e. Service request intake is through the customer-self-service portal and must include all required decision making documentation.
Service replacements	
Service renewals	
Service deployment	
Service decommission	
Service rationalization	
Service level agreements	

PROCESS 3 – REQUEST MANAGEMENT

This is the final step in the development of the IT strategy and a very important one. At this point, consider how to address the variable needs of customers with the finite resources and services of the organizations' IT department. In this step consider how to:

- Set service level agreements
- Establish vendor expectations
- Define resource expectation and financial buffers
- Examine service demand to predict future requirement and optimize current resources

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[1] A service level agreement (frequently abbreviated as SLA) is a part of a service contract where the level of service is formally defined.

- Capture/release available resources as required
- Bring in additional, temporary or permanent, resources

DONE STRATEGIZING!

This completes the strategy process. Get feedback on the practicality and usability of your strategy by circulating the strategy document to trusted advisors. When the strategy is completed move forward into the planning phase of this ITIL project.

Upon completion of this process the following items should be marked as complete.

- ✓ Service Documentation for each service
- ✓ Market definition
- ✓ Offering definition
- ✓ Financial management process
- ✓ Service portfolio management process
- ✓ Request management process

PLANNING THE IT SERVICE DESK PROJECT

Planning is required to select, configure and implement the Service Desk project. This plan will define incident and problem management processes.

Tips:

1. When developing these processes use mind mapping and flow charting tools. Look at FreeMind[2] or MindMeister[3].
2. Chart each process using the following criteria, helping you understand the risk of process failure / adoption. Score each criterion out of 5 and tally each row to determine if the process is viable or not. Scores above 60% are acceptable.

PROCESS DESCRIPTION	Practicality	Cultural Fit	Chance for success	Cost vs Benefit	Sustainability	Maintainable effort	Team Adoption (ability)	Success Potential <20 = high risk >30 = low risk

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[2] FreeMind is written in Java, so it will run on almost any system with a Java runtime environment. http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Download
[3] MindMeister, the leading online mind mapping software. http://www.mindmeister.com/

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

> **Incident management is a defined process for logging, recording and resolving incidents**
>
> **The aim of incident management is to restore the service to the customer as quickly as possible, often through a work around or temporary fixes, rather than through trying to find a permanent solution.**

- Incident management and problem management are not the same.
- Problem management looks at the underlying causes of incidents and a permanent solution to issues that continue to occur.

Using the services documentation prepared during the Services Listing Phase of this process, develop a procedure to manage each service with an incident process.

Chart as few processes as possible and apply many services to each process. Consider the following processes:

- Incident process
- Prioritization process
- Hierarchal escalation process – escalating to a manager
- Functional escalation process – escalating to another tech who has the skills required
- Major incident process

An incident management process may look like this: (FreeMind, mind map)
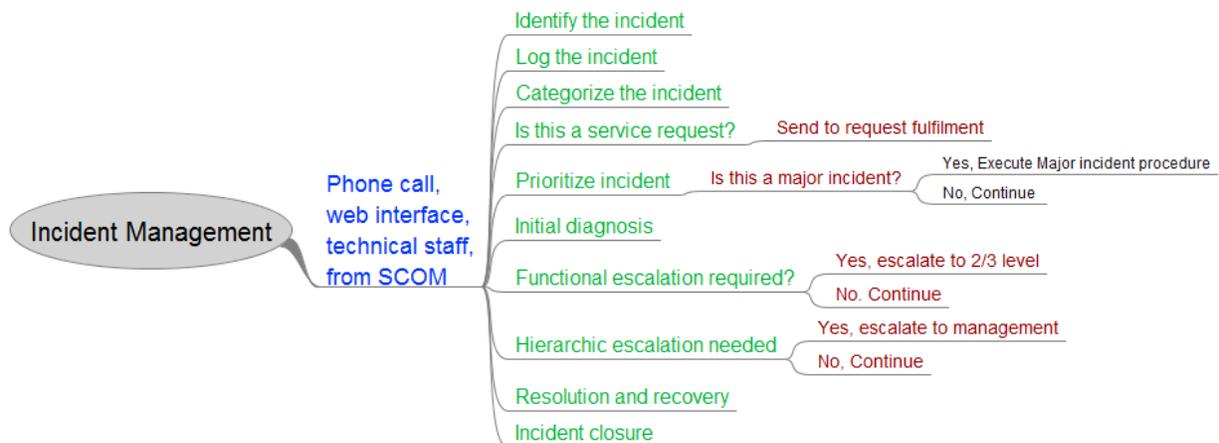
Update each of the Service Definitions with the corresponding Incident Management process and Service Level Agreement.

Upon completion of this process the following should be marked as completed:

- ✓ A number of incident management processes including:
  - o Incident process
  - o Prioritization process
  - o Hierarchal escalation process – escalating to a manager
  - o Functional escalation process – escalating to another tech who has the skills required
  - o Major incident process

- ✓ Service level agreements understood and assigned to services
- ✓ Services Documentation updated with the processes and service level agreements corresponding to them

STOP RIGHT HERE!

Complete the Incident Management process prior to starting the Problem Management process. Train the staff, work out the kinks, and remember to include organizational peers in the implementation of the system.

PROBLEM MANAGEMENT

ITIL talks about problem management as the practice of resolving the root causes of incidents. These can be understood through an examination of incidents, feedback from customers and change requests.

Incidents and problems are not the same. Incidents are where an error occurs or something doesn't work the way it is expected to. While problems address the root causes of incidents. A problem could be an incident that happens to many people, or it could be something that's not affecting anyone yet; like running out of disk space

Strategies for problem management could include:

- Reactive problem management – deal only with emergency type problems
- 80/20 problem management – deal with the 20% of the problems that are causing 80% of the incidents.

A successful Problem Management process is dependent on a working Incident Management process.

Verify that your Incident Management system:

- Collects detailed information
- Correlates incidents with problems
- The ITIL Strategy includes gaining management support for the allocation of resources and time for the problem solving processes

Decide how to identify problems in your Problem Management plan.

- What data will you analyze?
- What reports will you require?

An integrated Incident and Problem Management system may provide you with request trends, change requests, known errors, and fixes.

For example:

- What incidents are repetitive?
- Are there any system alerts?
- Are you getting negative feedback from the user community?
- What upgrades are coming up and could they be potential problems?

Periodically review the Problem Portfolio. the a managed system, where problems, priorities, and other useful information are stored.

Prepare a Problem Management process that defines:

- Resourcing and managing problems: Can one person be dedicated to the task? While single tasking is recommended by ITIL it might not be practical. Or will everyone have the potential of being a problem manager?   Engaging the team as a group of Problem Managers may be more effective and a better cultural fit.

- Problem Management review process: Determine who will attend, and at what frequency?

- Problems evaluation process: Establish the criteria for selecting a problem; will escalate into a mini-project or be discarded?

The problem management process may look like this:

Upon completion of the Problem Management process mark the following complete:

- ✓ A defined problem portfolio solution or strategy
- ✓ A process of identifying problems and logging them into a Problem Portfolio
- ✓ An executable, monthly process that facilitates a review of the Problem Portfolio
- ✓ A problem prioritization process
- ✓ A defined problem resourcing/management strategy
- ✓ A defined team of problem handlers
- ✓ A defined problem reporting process

CONCLUSION

Complete these strategies and processes to conclude this project:

- ✓ A services strategy information package that contains:
    - o Service Documentation for each service
    - o Market definition
    - o Offering definition
    - o Financial management process
    - o Service portfolio management process
    - o Demand management process
- ✓ An incident management information package that contains:
    - o A number of incident management processes including:
        - ▪ Incident process
        - ▪ Prioritization process
        - ▪ Hierarchal escalation process – escalating to a manager
        - ▪ Functional escalation process – escalating to another tech who has the skills required
        - ▪ Major incident process

    - o Service level agreements understood and assigned to services
    - o Services documentation updated with the processes and service level agreements associated with them
- ✓ A problem management information package that contains:
    - o A defined problem portfolio solution or strategy
    - o A process of identifying problems and logging them into a Problem Portfolio
    - o An executable, monthly process that facilitates a review of the Problem Portfolio
    - o A problem prioritization process
    - o A defined problem resourcing/management strategy
    - o A defined team of problem handlers
    - o A defined problem reporting process

CHOOSING A HELP DESK SYSTEM

There are many options available to the IT organization for Incident Management. Prior to evaluation of any help desk solution, it is important that you have charted your incident management processes completely and can use them to evaluate potential help-desk software candidates.

Be careful of overly complex systems that deliver **potential** future value. You will find, in your own research, using the Capability Maturity Model[4], most organizations including Apple and Microsoft have not left the CMM1 level and likely never will. Here are some rules for keeping your feet on the ground while evaluating software:

- Ensure that the software supports your strategy, incident management and problem management processes

- Features that are outside of the defined requirements, requiring maintenance by a resource must be deliberated carefully:
    - What value does the feature add?
    - How does the feature influence the total cost of ownership?
    - Does the feature satisfy some part of the strategy or objectives?
    - Can it be maintained and at what cost? (time and money)
    - What is the Return on Investment for the feature?

- Features that are not supported by your current culture must be evaluated carefully:
    - Can your culture change to meet the requirements of this feature?
    - Is there a benefit to the cultural change?
    - Is there support from the organization for the change?

Eliminate non-required functionality from the evaluation process. Costs and resources may be required to manage non-essential functionality. Eliminating non-essential functionality from the evaluation or marking them as undesirable traits will help keep costs and goals in alignment with the plan.

Over engineering ITIL processes will prove costly in the long-term. Costs and burdens from over engineering could include:

- Development, maintenance, licensing and training
- Loading of resources
- Unmanageable or unwieldy data

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[4]Capability Maturity Model, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capability_Maturity_Model

To facilitate the Help Desk System decision-making process, use this matrix.

Feature description	Weight Critical Non-critical C or N	Rating 1= unacceptable 2 = Acceptable 3 = Optimal

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and kick start your ITIL implementation

into high gear!

With this assessment you will meet with a Help Desk and Project Management expert for approximately 30 minutes. He will provide you with the following:

- ✓ An overview of your readiness for an integrated help desk / project management tool
- ✓ An ROI on the implementation of your help desk / project management tool
- ✓ An assessment presentation you can share with your team

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Appendix A: Generic Service Document Template

Document History

Author	
Date	
Document Location	
Revision History	

Version Number	Revision date	Author	Summary of Changes	Changes marked

Review and Approval

This document requires the following approvals.

Name	Signature	Title	Date of Issue	Version

This document has been distributed to:

Distribution

Name	Title	Date of Issue	Version

Service name	The name of the customer facing service as known to your customer.

Service description	A basic description of what the service does, and what the deliverables and outcomes are.
Service type	Depends on the categorisation structure you have established for your serve catalogue.
Supporting services	List any supporting services. A supporting service is an IT service that is not directly used by the business, but is required by the IT service provider to deliver customer-facing services (for example, a directory service or a backup service). Supporting services may also include IT services only used by the IT service provider. Also include information about the supporting service(s) relationship to the customer-facing services
Business owner(s)	Name and Job title It's best to also include the business owner's email address and contact number
Business unit(s)	Official business unit name A business unit is a segment of the business that has its own plans, metrics, income and costs.
Service owner(s)	Name and Job title, email address and contact number A service owner is responsible for managing one or more services throughout their entire lifecycle.
Business impact	Describe what would be the impact of not having this service available. Business impact is typically based on the number of users affected, the duration of the downtime, the impact on each user, and the cost to the business (if known). It may be easier to describe the positive business impact of the service being available.
Business priority	A category level (e.g. Critical versus None-critical or High, Medium, Low
Service level agreement	This can be a hyperlink to the full SLA An SLA is an agreement between an IT service provider and a customer. It describes the IT service, documents service level targets, and specifies the responsibilities of the IT service provider and the customer. A single agreement may cover multiple IT services or multiple customers or may be a corporate SLA covering many services and customers.
Service hours	For example, 'Monday–Friday 08:00 to 17:00 except public holidays'. Defined as an agreed time period when a particular IT service should be available. The service hours will also be defined in the service level agreement.
Business contacts	This is where you can document the key business contacts, maybe by location. For example, branch managers, department heads who may need to be contacted.
Escalation contacts	Typically name, email address and phone number of those in the defined escalation path in business and IT

Service reports	A list of the operational reports available for this particular service. May also include: • Service achievement reports • Operational reports. Typically produced frequently (weekly or perhaps even more frequently). • Exception reports. Typically produced whenever an SLA has been broken (or threatened, if appropriate thresholds have been set to give an 'early warning'). • Periodic reports. These are typically produced and circulated to customers (or their representatives) and appropriate IT managers a few days in advance of service level reviews, so that any queries or disagreements can be resolved ahead of the review meeting. May include a SLA monitoring (SLAM) chart at the front of a service report to give an 'at-a-glance' overview Periodic reports are typically synchronized with the reviewing cycle. These reports will be defined in detail in the full SLA.
Service reviews	Describe when and where they occur and the frequency of the review meeting. A service review meeting is where Service level management reports on service levels, reviews achievements, breaches and near misses and identifies required improvements with customers.
Security rating	Dependent upon your organisations security rating criteria