

IT incidents - where do they come from and what do they mean?

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Incidents happen, even if a business's IT functions like a well-oiled machine. Despite best efforts to implement streamlined IT Service Management (ITSM) best practices, underpinned by the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) framework, it's impossible to eliminate incidents altogether.



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Why? Well, incidents don't arise purely from technological inefficiency or poor IT service delivery; they arise from users not receiving the desired value they are looking for from the IT service they are consuming. Value is perceived by the user, and if the desired value from the service used is not obtained, whether due to a technical fault or their own inability to properly use it, they log an incident with the IT Service Desk.

What is an incident?

An incident is a disruption in the use of a service. For example, the internet appears to be down, and one is unable to send and receive email. However, organisations need to bear in mind that an incident ties back to the warranty of service - availability, capacity, continuity and security of a service, as defined in ITIL.

A failure of any one of these causes results in a dip in the quality of service and leads to a perceived lack of value. Any time a user has a disruption in the quality of service, it is regarded as an incident.

However, the types of incidents vary. It could be a widespread issue affecting multiple customers, such as a network failure or a system error that makes it inaccessible, or a narrower issue, such as a user's computer crashing, or VoIP handset not working.

Incident prioritisation

Some incidents are easy to prioritise. When the network is 'down', and nobody is able to work, it's glaringly obvious that the

issue needs to be resolved as quickly as possible. However, when the incidents are of lower impact, it becomes tricky to prioritise which one's need to be resolved first.

Incidents should be prioritised according to impact and urgency. The higher the impact and urgency, the higher the priority. However, IT may not understand the business impact of an incident as well as the business or user does.

Timing also affects prioritisation. At certain times of the month, some services may take precedence over others while being less important usually. For example, an account clerk who must generate invoices on a particular day over month end, may experience problems with their computer. The IT Desk must understand business priorities and timing. As such, the outage may require more urgent attention than attending to an issue that affects a wider area of users, but where the business impact is lower.

The service catalogue determines which services are required by the business and their availability. However, the catalogue should be agreed upon between both IT and the business, to establish what the business impact is of each service at various times of the business cycle.

Incident management

A reported incident doesn't just indicate that there is a specific issue. It also highlights any inefficiencies or areas of improvement for ITSM, drawing attention to underlying problems that may impact services later. It contributes towards ensuring continual service improvement, which is the basis of ITIL.

ABOUT EDWARD CARBUTT

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