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Escalation Management as the Necessary Form of Incident Management Process

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ABSTRACT

Escalation management is widely used for IT service management, and is also part of the ITIL recommendations. Carefully created escalation processes can ensure that unresolved problems don't linger and issues are promptly addressed. Escalation criteria such as missed deadlines are defined and result in appropriate actions, such as a change of status or a notification to a project member. Incident Management is an IT service management (ITSM) process area. The first goal of the incident management process is to restore a normal service operation as quickly as possible and to minimize the impact on business operations, thus ensuring that the best possible levels of service quality and availability are maintained.

Keywords: *Escalation, Incident, Management, Process*

1. INTRODUCTION

The escalation is a process used to highlight or flag certain issues within an organization, so that the appropriate personnel can respond to these situations and monitor the resolutions.

Escalations occur in support centres for a variety of reasons. An escalation management system allows an organization to identify, track, monitor and manage situations that require increased awareness and swift action.

2. ESCALATION MANAGEMENT

Escalation management is widely used for IT service management. Escalation management is also part of the ITIL recommendations. Carefully created escalation processes can ensure that unresolved problems don't linger and issues are promptly addressed. [1]

Using Escalation Management can re-prioritize, reassign, and monitor a situation to a satisfactory completion. There are two types of escalations: hierarchical and functional (Fig. 1).

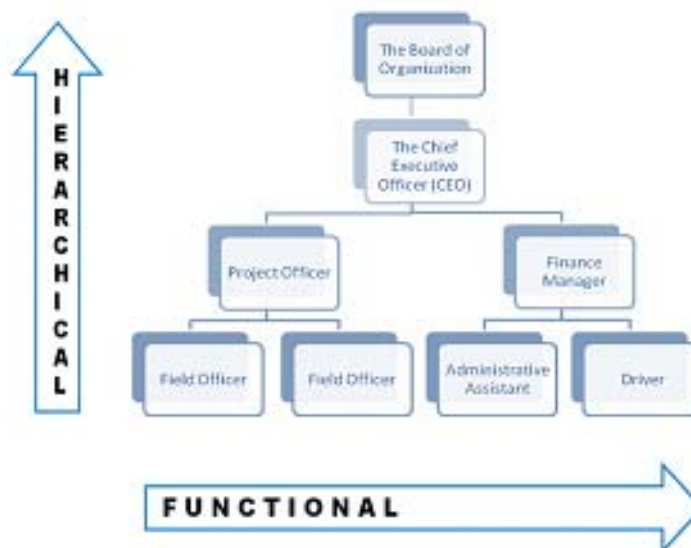


Fig 1: Type of Escalation

2.1 Hierarchical Escalation

Hierarchical escalation is used to ensure attention for notification or to take any necessary action. 1st level support is unable to resolve the issue so it is escalated to 2nd level support. In case they are also not able to solve

the issue they are escalating it to 3rd level support and so on until the issue is resolved. [2, 3]

During the hierarchical escalation the management focus is in place (Fig. 2).

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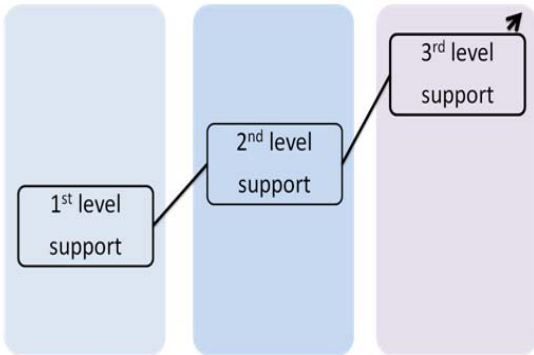


Fig 2: Hierarchical escalation

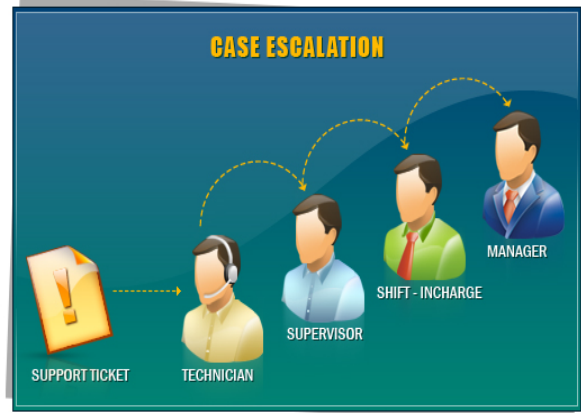


Fig 3: Case Escalation [13]

Case escalation is shown in Fig. 3 and examples of levels of escalation are shown in Fig. 4.



Fig 4: Levels of escalation – example [13]

2.2 Functional Escalation

Functional escalation (Fig. 5) is used in case that the support team is unable to resolve the issue or stick within the agreed timeline (targeted time for resolution is exceeded). [4, 5]



Fig 5: Functional escalation

If should an escalation management of the organization be effective, the priorities need to be set properly as well as the escalation process needs to be shared with all stakeholders. Priority is a result of a combination of importance and urgency. Example of priority is described below (Fig. 6).



Fig 6: Priority matrix [10]

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Impact means business restriction, it can be low, medium or high. Urgency reflects the importance for customer; it can be low, medium or high. The highest priority is 1 as it has impact high and urgency high. The lowest priority is 5, impact and urgency are low. Usually the priorities are related with target resolution time. The target resolution time for priority 1 is 2 hours, priority 2 is 4 hours, priority 3 is 14 hours, priority 4 is 24 hours, and priority 5 is 48 hours. The target resolution time is defined in the service level agreement (SLA) between the company and the customer. [6]

2.3 Escalation Management Process

Escalation Management is to bring order, structure, focused management attention and additional resources to those customer situations which could otherwise result in a high level of customer dissatisfaction and/or damage to the service provider's reputation. These are situations which could lead to significant loss of business to the Customer or IT Service Provider or where significant costs may be incurred by IT Service Provider to resolve the customer situation.

The criteria to trigger an escalation depend on the organisation or service provider. But it should be well defined.

The process could consist of the following activities:

- Initiate an Escalation, based on meeting specific escalation criteria,
- Assign an Escalation manager for the escalation,
- Log the Escalation and link the Escalation record to related Incident or Problem records,
- Escalation manager assigns or appoints the escalation team. The escalation team should include the Incident owner, Problem owner, and other subject matter experts, as required,
- Identify appropriate Service Provider and Customer management contacts,
- Conduct a detailed situation appraisal and review, led by the Escalation manager,
- An escalation management action plan, including additional resources needed, is developed in conjunction with the Customer. The escalation management plan is to be executed in parallel with the detailed technical action plan (as per Incident/Problem Management),
- The escalation management action plan is reviewed and adjusted as required,
- A Hierarchical Escalation (as per Incident Management process) is initiated, if appropriate. Senior management and executives are alerted,
- Escalation team works to resolve the problem. At each stage, records are updated and management contacts and team are informed of the progress and escalation plan reviewed and adjusted as required,

- Once resolved to the Customer's satisfaction, the situation is monitored for an agreed period,
- The escalation team remains on standby and available in case the problem recurs during the monitoring period,
- Once the monitoring period is successfully completed, the escalation is closed by the Escalation manager, after seeking agreement with the Customer,
- Once the escalation is closed, a post escalation review is conducted and input provided to the Problem Management process. This can be done in conjunction with the Major Problem Review which is part of Problem Management.

Escalation Management is closely related to and supports the Incident Management, Request Management and Problem Management processes. It is an important process that should be treated with equal or greater focus as compared to these other well-defined ITIL processes.

2.4 Escalation Plan

An escalation plan is a set of procedures set in place to deal with potential problems in a variety of contexts. In a call centre, for example, an escalation plan specifies measures to be implemented when unexpected strain or an increased level of stress is placed upon the centre. This stress can be in the form of a disaster or increased call volume. The escalation plan is put into effect once a certain threshold is hit, such as when the queue hits an unacceptable level.

An example of how the escalation levels can be defined is shown in Fig. 7.

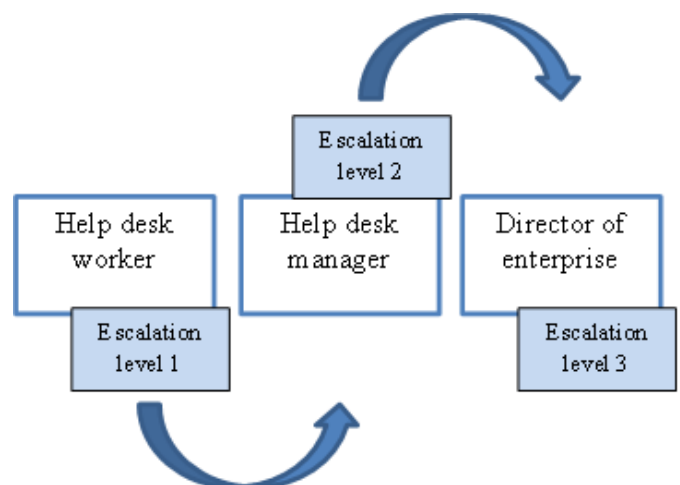


Fig 7: Escalation levels

If the enterprise has incorrectly or vaguely defined escalation plan, employees' don't know whom to contact and how to contact. This extends the time to resolve the incident (see Fig. 8).

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Fig 8: Ambiguous escalation plan

books, which can be purchased online, ITIL services and products include training, qualifications, software tools and user groups such as the IT Service Management Forum.

ITIL is currently maintained and developed by the United Kingdom's Office of Government Commerce.

ITIL includes the following parts (Fig. 9):

- Service Strategy,
- Service design,
- Service Operation,
- Service Transition,
- continual service improvement.

3. ITIL

The ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) is a globally recognized collection of best practices for information technology (IT) service management. The United Kingdom's Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) created the ITIL in response to the growing dependence on information technology to meet business needs and goals. ITIL is organized into "sets" of books which are defined by related functions: service strategy, service design, managerial, service transition, service operation and continual service improvement software. In addition to the

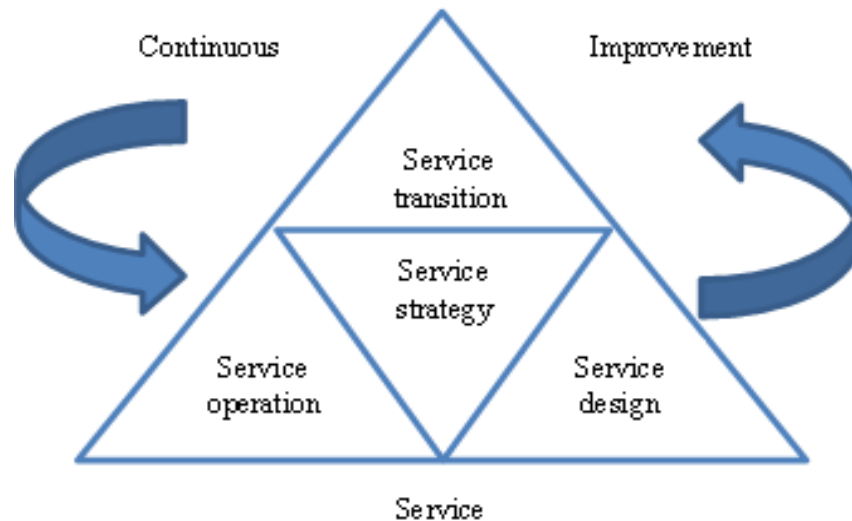


Fig 9: ITIL parts [12]

ITIL process model is shown in Fig. 10; it shows the relationships of individual processes.

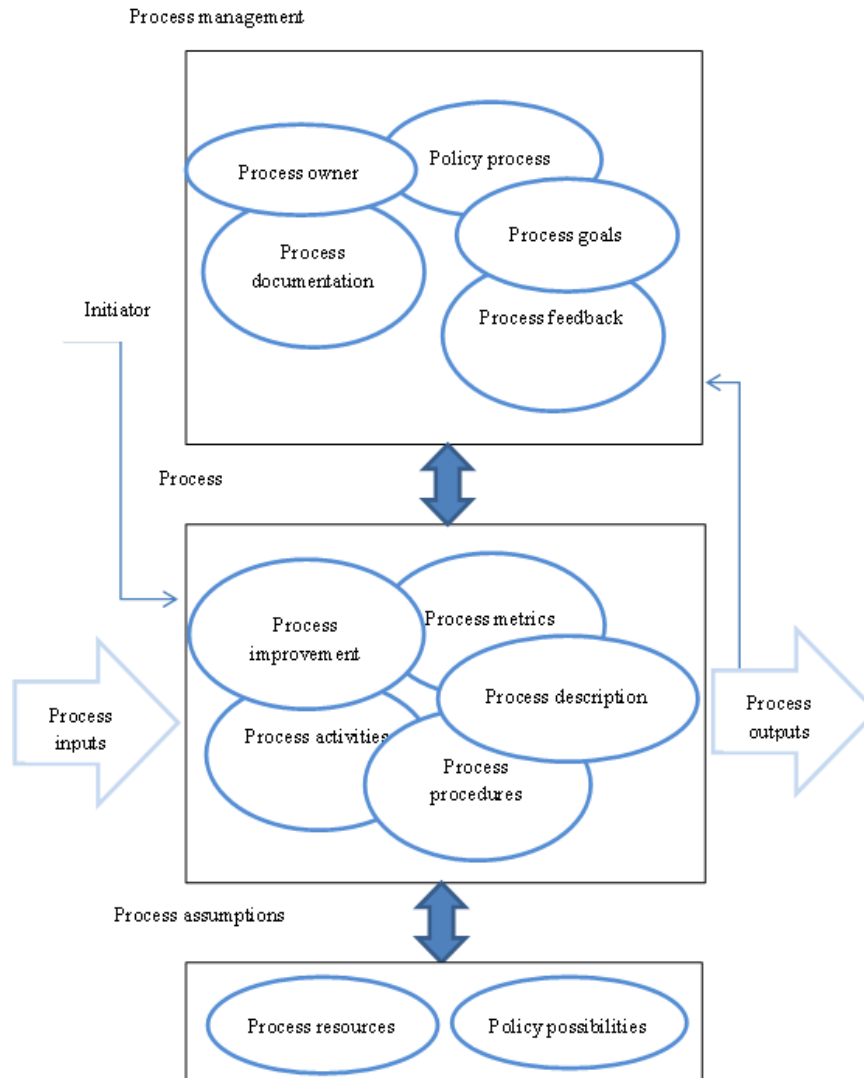


Fig 10: ITIL process model [14]

4. ESCALATION MANGEMENT AND INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Escalation management is mostly used in incident management process. Incident is something that needs to be resolved immediately. This can either be via a permanent fix, a workaround or a temporary fix. An example of an incident would be a broken network cable. If a disruption is planned, for example a scheduled maintenance, this is not an incident. The outage should not be counted as part of the unavailability. If the scheduled outage exceeds the planned schedule than the overtime for the outage becomes an incident.[7]

4.1 Incident Management

Incident management process is used to restore normal service operation as quickly as possible and minimise the adverse impact on business operations. Using the incident management process is increasing the visibility and communication of incidents, maintain user satisfaction with the quality of IT services.[8]

Incident management process is managed and covered by incident mangers. They are accountable for identifying the process gaps, informing the stakeholders about the incident lifecycle (Fig. 11), urging the resolution of the incidents and activating the stakeholders. [9]

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Fig 11: Incident lifecycle

5. CONCLUSION

Escalation is often mentioned when dealing with Incident and Problem Management processes. Escalation management is widely used for IT service management. Carefully created escalation processes can ensure that unresolved problems don't linger and issues are promptly addressed. Escalation criteria such as missed deadlines are defined and result in appropriate actions, such as the change of status or the notification to the project member. Project escalation is both the art and the science – it is also the risky art, because the escalation can lead to personal clashes and backfires. Identifying project situations where escalation is the only way out and having the courage to escalate these situations professionally to the right people is necessary to helping the project.

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