



ITIL Series



ITIL Service Desk Structures

By Size and Location

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Should the business wish to expand a contract, service desk provision must change accordingly. Local desks still need to share knowledge with the other desks, as the fault may affect several locations (A WAN fault for example). Arrangements would need to be in place to avoid several desks (or none) taking ownership. The local desk would need to share a common database, especially of known errors, to avoid re-designing the wheel.

This structure can also be useful when different locations have specialized support needs. The basic principle of a single point of contact is retained, because, from the user perspective, they have only one number to call and are unaware of any other desks that may exist.

This is, however, an expensive option, because each new office location would require a new service desk too. During periods of low activity, several service desk staff members could be spread across the various desks waiting for calls. The potential issues of incidents and requests being logged in different languages, systems may occur, making incident analysis and problem identification difficult. Sharing knowledge is also more difficult: an incident that could be resolved by one service desk might be escalated by another, because the resolution has not been shared between the desks.

To overcome these issues, IT management must ensure that information is shared effectively. Procedures will need to be put in place to ensure that issues affecting more than one location can be managed effectively without duplication of effort, or without each service desk assuming that another desk is taking responsibility for an issue.

There are a number of different possible structures for providing a service desk. Which does your organization use? The best structure for the service desk is dependent upon the size and structure of the organization. A global organization will have different needs from one with all its employees based in the same location. Here we look at the most common structures; the best option may be a combination of them.

The first structure is a local service desk at each customer location. This can be costly, but sometimes is useful for local language support.

Central



All locations share a Service Desk

- ◆ No local knowledge, but...
- ◆ Cost-effective
- ◆ May need multi-lingual staff for language support
- ◆ Better technology may be easier to cost-justify
- ◆ No confusion when handling major incidents
- ◆ Easier knowledge-sharing
- ◆ Will need local support at customer locations where physical intervention is required (unjamming a printer etc.)
- ◆ Requires a service continuity plan as potential single point of failure

A more common structure for service desks is that of a centralized service desk; all users contact the same service desk.

This has economies of scale, because there is no duplication of provision. Specialist technology, such as intelligent call distribution or an integrated service management tool, may be justified for a centralized service desk, but not when implementing this technology across many sites.

There are no issues with confusion regarding ownership of major incidents, and knowledge-sharing becomes much more straightforward. To provide support to a global organization, a 24/7 service may be required.



All locations share a number of Service Desks, with calls routed across a telephone network, so that the next free agent gets the call

- ◆ Need shared database and processes, and a common language for data entry
- ◆ Should appear seamless to the user (may not even realize there is more than one desk)
- ◆ Can be hard to maintain business knowledge
- ◆ In-built resilience

The third organizational option described by ITIL is that of a virtual service desk. This option consists of two or more service desk locations that operate as one desk. Calls and emails are distributed across the staff members as if they were in one centralized location. This ensures that the workload is balanced across all the desks. To the user, the virtual service desk appears as a single entity; the users may be completely unaware that this is not the case in reality. The virtual service desk retains the single point of contact principle.

The considerations we discussed earlier regarding knowledge sharing and clear ownership apply even more in this scenario, as does the need for all calls to be logged immediately. Users will become very frustrated if they call the service desk and explain an issue in detail, only to find when they call for a second time that the service desk analyst can find no record of their first call.

One benefit of a virtual structure is that it has built-in resilience; should one location go offline because of a major disruption affecting that location, the service would continue with little or no impact.

Follow the Sun

The fourth structure described within ITIL is known as Follow the Sun. This is a form of virtual service desk, but with this structure, the allocation of calls across the various desks is based on time of day, rather than workload.

“Follow the Sun” enables a global organization to provide support around the clock, without needing to employ staff members at night to work on the service desk. A number of service desks will each work standard office hours. The calls will be allocated to which-ever desk or desks are open at that time. Typically, this might mean a European service desk will handle calls until the end of the European working day, when calls will then be allocated to a desk or desk in North America. When the working day in North America finishes, calls are directed at another desk or desks in the Asia-Pacific region, before being directed back to the European desk at the start of the next European working day.



This option is an attractive one for many global organizations, providing 24-hour coverage without the need for shift or on-call payments. The requirements for effective call logging, a centralized database, and a common language for data entry referred to earlier for the virtual structure apply equally here. Procedures for handoff between desks are also required to ensure that the desk that is taking over knows the status of any major incidents, and so on.

To the user, the single point of contact still applies; they have one number to call, no matter who answers it or where the service desk analyst may be located.

'Follow the Sun' is a form of virtual Service Desk, with calls routed according to the time of day

It enables 24 hour global coverage without shifts

The desk still appears as a single point of contact to the user

ITIL requirements for knowledge-sharing, a common database etc. still apply

Specialized

Although this approach can be useful, especially where in-depth knowledge is required to resolve a call, it is not popular with users when it expands to numerous options to choose from, followed by another message saying:

“Thank you. You now have a further (N) options.”



Specialized Service Desk Groups

Another possible variant on the previous structures is to provide specialist support for particular services. In this structure, a user may call the usual service desk number and then choose an option depending on the issue they have. Typically, the message would say:

“Press 1 if the call is regarding system (X), press 2 if it is regarding system (Y), or hold for a service desk analyst if your call is in regard to anything else.”

There is a danger that the user does not always know what support they need and may choose the wrong option, leading to delay and frustration. For example, a printer that will not print may be because of a hardware fault, a network issue, an application malfunction, or a user error. The user will not know which option to choose.

This specialist support option works best for a small number of complex services that require a level of both business and technical knowledge beyond what can reasonably be expected of a service desk analyst.



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