

Understanding ITSM Incident Management Workflow

Presented By:



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Understanding IT Service Management

IT Service Management (ITSM) revolves around the principle that your IT organization, or IT department, provides and maintains services for the good of the business. Making sure these services both meet the needs of the business and are available when and where they need them means you need both a set of processes and tools to make sure your team operates efficiently and effectively. Knowing where to start to improve though, and what tools will help, rather than hinder you is a critical component to your team's success.

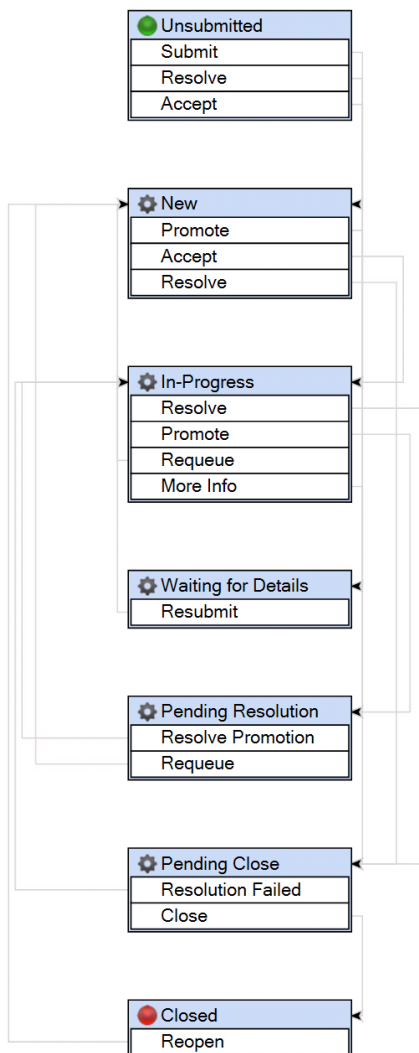
That's where the Understanding ITSM series of help guides from SunView Software comes in. As a compliment to our Getting Started guides, this next level is aimed at taking you from researching and determining necessary requirements for a modern ITSM solution to applying principles in your organization that have been built from a foundation of best practices such as ITIL®.

It is important to remember that this guide should function more like a reference and template for your own unique situation. While it can be followed strictly, it is likely there will need to be adaptations for your specific implementation. We appreciate your interest, and as always, invite you to look at our complete range of help guides, fact sheets, and white papers. Most importantly...

Good Luck on Your Project!

- The SunView Software Team

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Core Incident Workflow
Screenshot from the ChangeGear®
Visual Workflow Editor

Incident Management Workflow Overview

At the core of every IT organization is the Service Desk, the evolution, or perhaps more accurately, the vision of the Help Desk. No matter what name you use for your desk, it is where the day-to-day operations of keeping services performing up to the expectations (be they of monumental height sometimes) of your customers and the business in general.

While each organization will have different needs processed by their service desk, there is at least one common function across them all. Mainly, every Service Desk will process incident requests. The key word there being process.

Processes, even if you haven't written them down, must exist in order for anything to get done. This is true, even if "getting done" isn't the most efficient way (yet). Once we understand the process, we can develop a flow, or rather, we can create the workflow. Thus, one of your team's first steps should be to document your current process, make sure to note when notifications should occur and the various options for accepting, routing, and closing an incident.

In this guide we will work with a simple ITIL-aligned incident workflow that will serve as a solid base to work from. Of course, the more mature your IT organization, the more tweaks you may need, and in turn will be able to handle.

The Core of the Incident Workflow

For our purposes, a workflow will consist of three main components; states, actions, and transitions. While rules and automations will also be an integral part, these three are at the core. In addition, there are inherent differences in specific state types such as start, process, approval,

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and end. However, these are for much more advanced workflows, examples of which can be seen in the sidebar.

For now, we will work with six core, or major states of an incident workflow. They are listed below.

1. Submit
2. New
3. In-Progress
4. Pending Resolution
5. Pending Close
6. Close

In the next section, we will describe each of these states in detail.

The Major States of an Incident Workflow

As we mentioned, there are six major states of the incident workflow. Below, we have described each of these. In addition, when applicable we have included standard actions that may be associated with a state. Be sure to keep in mind, that workflows can become very complex, and will most often have more than just six states. Typically, they will also have several, if not more, actions per state, with each of those having specific rules and automations. For now though, just focus on building a foundation that will support complexity as your organization, and/or project matures.

Unsubmitted

Typical Actions - Submit, Resolve, Accept

When a customer encounters something they don't understand or believe to be a defect, an incident is reported. Thus the unsubmitted state represents the very first state an

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incident can be in. This might be a customer submitting an incident they have encountered, or a member of the service desk entering the incident based on a phone call they received. From the unsubmitted state you will typically have actions that allow you to move the incident onto resolution or process, and escalate it accordingly.

It is also important to keep in mind that in some service desk situations, a ticket may be submitted right away. For example, when receiving an incident via telephone, a technician will likely confirm the acceptance over the phone.

Tips for Automation and Efficiency

Pay special attention to customizing forms that capture all the information you need upfront. Each field can be used to create specific automations based on ensuring the information your team needs is included before an incident is submitted will be essential. In addition, fields will provide a platform, or “jumping off point” for additional automations later in the process.

New

Typical Actions - Promote, Accept, Resolve

A new ticket represents an incident that has not previously been submitted by a customer and resolved, and has been placed in a work queue for technicians to review. Most importantly, this state determines whether a technician’s time is necessary, and/or if it will require movement to a specific team to work towards resolution. In some instances, a technician may not have a solution right away to resolve the ticket.

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Tips for Automation and Efficiency

A new ticket is the perfect place to begin applying automations. For example from submission, the SLA should be linked and tracking any time associated with the incoming incident(s). Also, while validity may still need to be a manual process, promotion to a different work queue can be based on severity and category. Thus specific customizations on a form can lead to automated routing the ITSM system can manage.

In-Progress

Typical Actions - Resolve, Promote, Requeue, More Info

An incident that is in a state of “In Progress,” likely means it will follow the full path of research. This can include searching knowledge base articles, and any associated testing. It may also require additional information from the person that submitted the incident, or in some cases, it might be necessary to promote the incident to someone with the expertise to reach a resolution.

Tips for Automation and Efficiency

Similar to the New state, In-Progress also benefits from tight integration with SLA benchmarks. That means an SLA will be at the heart of most automation. For example, if an incident is approaching pre-defined thresholds, the ITSM system should send automatic notifications to team leaders and/or managers to advise of possible SLA breach. This is also a great place to consider automating the creation and distribution of reports to the management team.

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Waiting for Details

Typical Action - Resubmit

Not everything related to an incident means it requires a technician. In many cases, more information may be needed, and that necessitates additional contact with the customer. Most often this is the state that comes from someone taking the action of More Info - which will require the customer to take the action of Resubmit.

Tips for Automation and Efficiency

Notification, specifically through email is critical both for the customer and the assigned technician. Without it, you won't have a link that follows the incident from the original submission (even though it currently lacks critical information).

Pending Resolution

Typical Actions - Resolve Promotion, Requeue

The state of Pending Resolution is the point at which a possible resolution has been reached and there are now steps required to test any proposed solutions. In some cases this may be a temporary workaround until a necessary change can be made to permanently resolve the incident. In most, it will mean sending a proposed resolution to the customer to test and confirm.

Tips for Automation and Efficiency

As with the previous states, SLA automation is very important with regard to pending resolution. However, notification to the customer should be part of your standard set of automations as well. Also keep in mind the possibilities for reporting based

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on the state, and any actions taken. For example, a good metric is the number of incidents at any given time you have pending.

Pending Close

Typical Actions - Resolution Failed, Close

The state of Pending Close can most commonly be compared to a handshake between the customer and the technician. In some cases, a proposed solution may require that a change request be submitted, approved, and then pushed to a live environment. Though in many cases, a workaround will be put into place as well.

Tips for Automation and Efficiency

You may start to see a pattern with regard to automations. Just as with previous states and actions, a number of automations are possible including notification back to the technician(s) and eventually, closure of the ticket. At the same time, reports can be generated and distributed to management automatically.

Close

Typical Action - Reopen

The state of Close represents an incident that no longer needs any additional work and has been approved by both technicians and the customer. Closure most typically happens after or during the previous state (pending close). While this is ultimately the end state for an incident, in some cases there may be a reason to reopen the incident.

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Tips for Automation and Efficiency

Automation to close a ticket can be triggered from the point a customer validates the proposed solution. Again, at the point of closure reports, especially those related maintaining and meeting SLA thresholds can be created and distributed without any human interaction. In addition, and as is the recurring theme, notification to the customer and technicians of the closure should be standard.

Conclusion and Working Templates

Given the above, you now have the materials to build a framework for your incident management workflow. We'd like to offer a few more pieces that should help you in your journey. Attached to the end of this document are two templates. The first should help you work through your own basic workflow, with the second giving you an example of how complex workflows can become.

It is most important to remember, that no matter how complex your workflows are, that complexity should be representative of business choices you have made, not limitations on your current ITSM solution (or lack thereof). While business processes can be adapted, and when necessary changed, a confining tool will present frustrations that become increasingly harder to deal with and manage. We wish you luck in your improvements, and invite you to check back with us often for additional help and resources.

Figure 1 - Simple Incident Workflow

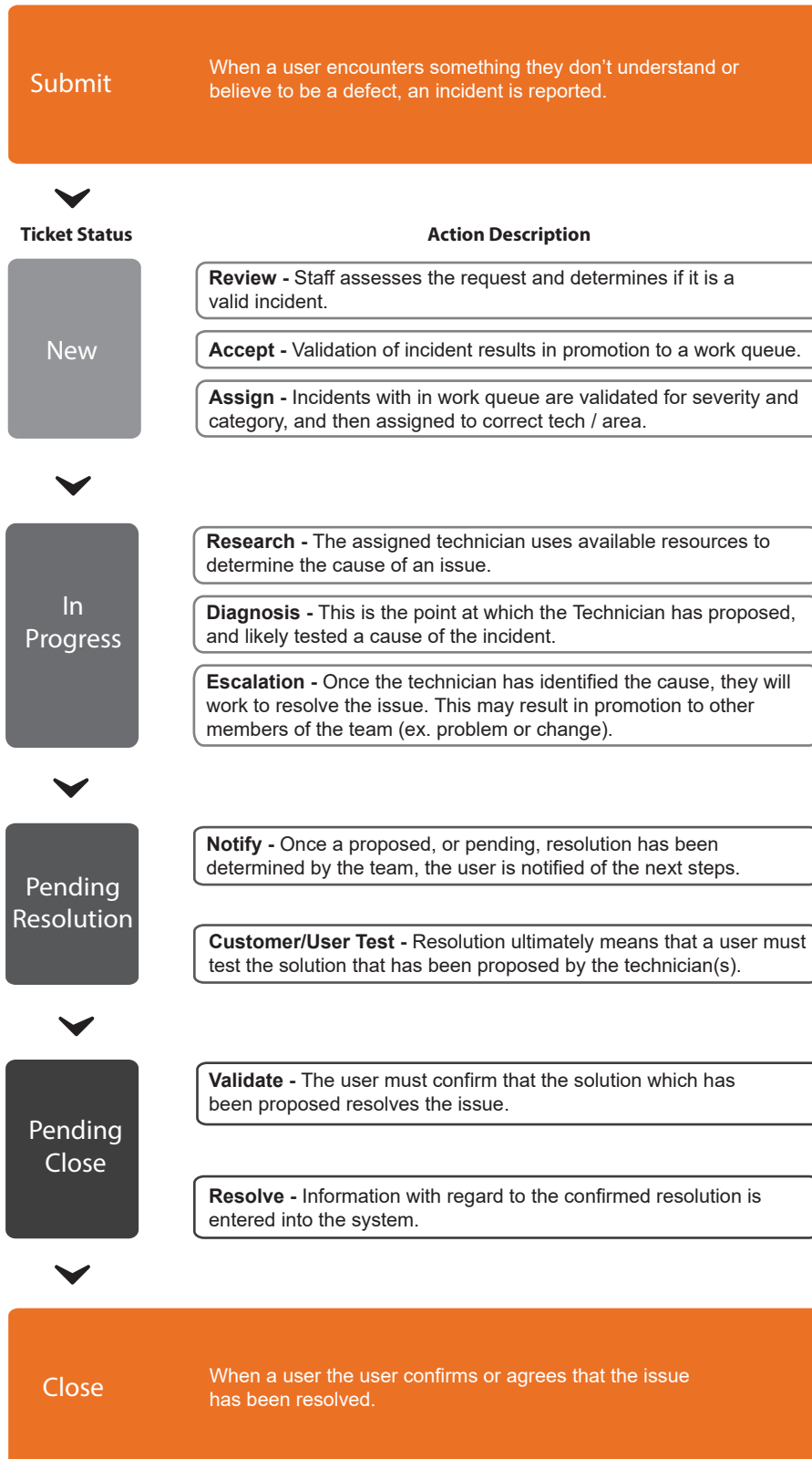


Figure 2 - Complex Incident Workflow

