# Has ITIL v3 refreshed the parts that the ITSM vendors cannot reach?

Gartner published their latest IT Service Desk magic quadrant on August 23rd and it makes depressing reading for all of the major suppliers of ITSM solutions. In effect, every major vendor has had their ranking downgraded due to a lack of innovation within their offerings and the market in general. Anyone who has walked the halls of the numerous ITSM related trade shows and expos in recent years will have undoubtedly had a feeling of déjà vu and will probably have concluded that very little of interest was happening within the ITSM solution market… Sure, there have been some minor marketing diversions such as the CMDB and Service Impact modelling phenomena to amuse and entertain, but substantial grass roots innovation has been very thin on the ground. I for one, applaud Gartner's stance as it would be very easy for an organisation whose major revenue streams come from the organisations upon which they comment to have towed the industry line and to have concealed the truth with marketing sound bites.

So if the market is really devoid of true innovation, will the recent release of ITIL v3 do anything to help it drag itself out of the mire? Gartner cite the Incident Management arena as one area where innovation is particularly lacking, so let us see if the refreshed ITIL text will help or hinder organisations keen to move beyond the current status quo and really start to improve the way in which they deal with incidents and outages. Opening the ITIL v3 Service Operations book we are greeted with the familiar terminology and process diagrams of v2. Now this of course is a good thing as the purpose of the v3 project was to build upon the successes of the past and to take the industry forward. So by how much has the incident management process been updated? Sadly the answer is "not a lot". In fact there is very little new content. Admittedly the v3 text does fill some of v2's gaps around categorisation and prioritisation but this is nothing more than completing the unfinished elements of its predecessor. If we are looking for innovative improvements to incident handling practice then we will have to look elsewhere.

This is hardly surprising when we consider who the authors of the ITIL v3 documentation are. The author team includes several representatives of the vendor community that Gartner lambastes for their lack of vision and innovative thinking. Even taking potential vendor bias and conflicts of interest out of the equation, is it any wonder then that the v3 text is as barren of any truly new or ground breaking ideas and concepts as it is. Certainly, v3 has more of a service orientated focus than v2. But this is largely just filling in the blanks of before – there has been very little improvement to the core processes that underpin the service lifecycle theme…

So how could and should the Incident Management solution of the future behave? Here are just a few examples of capabilities that might have been included in ITIL v3…

***Real time prioritisation*** – Rather than a static value selected by the user or system based upon a predefined set of business rules, the Incident management system of the future will automatically review the currently open incidents against a variety of factors and apply a revised priority setting periodically. For example, a poorly performing financial application server may not be a business priority until the end of

the quarter approaches in which case the ticket's priority should be automatically increased to ensure that the issue is addressed before the impact becomes critical.

***Dynamic data collection interfaces*** – Depending upon the type of incident being dealt with the system would require the user to enter specific pieces of information based upon predefined templates and interaction scripts. User inputs to one question may result in the system taking a context sensitive path through the branched data collection script and it will the automatically ask a further set of specific and detailed questions to ensure that the pertinent information is captured at the first point of contact.

***Multiple classification structures*** – Today's Incident Management systems typically have a single structure which is used for a variety of purposes. Next generation systems will abandon this compromise and will facilitate separate classification trees and data points during the lifecycle of a ticket. For instance, the reported classification would be used by self service users; the first line classification would be compared with the accepted issue classification to determine the accuracy of the front line service reps. The closure classification would track the potential causes and contributory factors etc.

***Parallel assignments*** – It is bogus to accept historic best practice that states that an incident is worked upon by a single group or individual at any given time. Today's complex IT environment requires multiple parties to investigate and take action regarding a single incident in parallel if the end to end resolution time is not to be excessive. Consider a poorly performing corporate application, the incident owner would task the network, database and application support teams to conduct a review and come back with results and proposed actions at the same time. So who would be assigned? Clearly all four parties are involved with the incident during this period and the system should be capable of demonstrating, tracking and managing this…

***Increased use of statistical techniques*** – It is amazing to think that something as trivial as a histogram would be considered as innovative within today's ITSM tool marketplace. The use of histograms (and other more advanced statistical methods and concepts) is needed if organisations are to transcend the knowledge pyramid from mere data collection and display to meaningful data analysis and understanding. Imagine having a histogram showing the distribution of incidents by the time of day, the day of the week, and the day of the month or quarter for example. Such trends should form the basis of every initial problem investigation. This is eminently achievable using today's toolsets and yet it hasn't become part of the mainstream product lines yet. Is it because the application vendors are unable to do the math?

***Workaround tracking*** – When does a workaround become a fix? More often than it should! Traditional tools readily allow for the closure of an incident using a workaround but seldom include the processes and functions to proactively follow up on such cases and to pre-emptively replace the workaround with a permanent fix. Workarounds by their very nature are transient sticky plasters that are intended to stem the effects of an issue rather than to remove the problem all together. Unless an organisation follows up on its workaround portfolio it is likely that the short term

successes from their usage could store up significant problems for the unwary as their inherent legacy comes home to roost.

The above represents nothing more than a taster of what could be, there are of course many many other areas where today's incident management process could and should be improved significantly including:

- User skills profiling
- Near-miss management
- Expectation management
- Outage prediction
- Demand modelling
- Improved incident correlation techniques

The key to kick starting such an innovation revolution within the tool vendors is not in deciding what could be done but in what order it should be done. And for this every customer has a voice. The enhancement request mechanisms of the major players have long since been little more than a holding post for dissenting and frustrated voices in the wilderness. It is time that the entire market made its voice heard and began to demand that the solutions it buys have additional features and functions, similar to those outlined above, included as standard options. Only then will innovation return to the discipline... At least for a little while.

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