

Function, Process, Role - Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?

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Is it animal, vegetable or mineral? That parlor game question seems particularly appropriate to ITIL V3 as it devotes a segment of each domain to detailing "Function, Process and Role."

One of the fallouts of previous incarnations of ITIL was the rush to establish new positions in the organization to align with the ITIL processes. Naming an Incident, Change or Service Level Manager was a clear-cut directive. But do we really need, and can an ordinary organization really support, a full-time Configuration Manager or Availability Manager?

ITIL V3 very clearly delineates how the ITIL processes work within the boundaries and responsibilities of the organizational structure by defining the Functions that perform the activity, the Process that may extend across several Functions to accomplish the objective of the activity, and the Role that an individual within a Function plays when performing a Process.

Many people, when first exposed to ITIL and its concepts, start thinking about how they might reorganize the IT department around the ITIL processes. Let's explore the relationship between functions, processes and roles.

The term Function refers to a group of people often aligned by a particular technical skill or technology, such as system administrators, or Java programmers. These Functions or technical functional areas carry out various Processes or activities.

A Process, on the other hand, is a set of structured activities that achieve some specific goal or objective,

def: Function – *A team or group of people and the tools they use to carry out one or more **process** or activity.*

def: Process – *A structured set of activities designed to accomplish a specific objective. A **process** may include any of the **roles**, responsibilities, tools and management controls required to reliably deliver the desired output.*

def: Role – *A set of responsibilities, activities and authorities granted to a person or team. A **role** is defined within a **process**.*

such as restore a service or find a problem. A Process may involve the participation of many Functional areas to accomplish its objective. The staff members of the Functional areas perform the process by carrying out the responsibilities of various roles assigned to them.

A Role is a defined set of activities that a staff person carries out, in support of a Process.

Processes, in fact, often cut across many Functions, involving many different staff members, each carrying out their Roles. So, in order to implement the ITIL processes, it is really not necessary, or desirable for that matter, to try to organize the Processes as Functions.

For example, let's look at an imaginary scenario involving a broken printer, and classify the mix of Functions, Processes and Roles that contribute to moving an Incident through diagnosis as a Problem, development of a Workaround, and implementation of a Change.

Step	Function	Process	Role
User A calls the Service Desk to report that a printer is not working.	Service Desk	Incident Management	Incident Recording
The Service Desk begins following the Incident Management process to restore the user to service.	Service Desk	Incident Management	Incident Classification
Shortly after User A calls, Users B, C, D and so forth, call to report the same Incident.	Service Desk	Incident Management	Incident Classification
The Service Desk escalates the Incident to the Technical Support group for resolution.	Service Desk	Incident Management	Incident Escalation
The Technical Support group determines that there is an unknown underlying error causing the printer failure and opens a Problem record.	Technical Support	Problem Management	Problem Control
The Technical Support group knows that it will not be able to restore the printer to full service within the time frames specified in the Service Level Agreement and notifies the Service Desk that it will redirect all print jobs to a different departmental printer.	Technical Support	Incident Management	Incident Investigation & Diagnosis
The Technical Support group troubleshoots and diagnoses the Problem and determines that it must update the patch level on the server. The patch upgrade requires a server reboot.	Technical Support	Problem Management	Error Control
The Technical Support group closes the Problem record and opens a Known Error record to document the error.	Technical Support	Problem Management	Error Control
The Technical Support group issues a Request for Change to make the patch change.	Technical Support	Problem Management	Error Control
The Change Advisory Board reviews the RFC and determines that the server will have to be rebooted during normal working hours.	Change Advisory Board	Change Management	Assessment
The Service Level Manager, who sits on the Change Advisory Board, contacts the User representative and clears a specified time for the patch upgrade and reboot.	Service Level Management	Change Management	Planning & Coordination
The Change Advisory Board adds the patch upgrade and reboot schedule to the Forward Schedule of Changes and Projected Service Availability report and forwards them to the Service Desk.	Change Advisory Board	Change Management	Planning & Coordination
The Service Desk communicates the forthcoming change and period of unavailability to the appropriate Users.	Service Desk	Incident Control	Communications
At the specified time, the Technical Support group installs the patch, reboots the server, and verifies that the printer is working.	Technical Support	Change Management	Change Building
The Technical Support group returns the completed RFC to the Change Manager	Technical Support	Change Management	Post-Release Technical Review
The Change Manager closes the change and informs the Service Desk.	Change Management	Change Management	Closure
The Service Desk verifies the printer is working with the User and closes the Incident ticket.	Service Desk	Incident Management	Closure

Summary

The above scenario involves three different processes (Incident, Problem, Change), five different Functions (Service Desk, Technical Support, Change Management, Change Advisory Board, Service Level Management), and numerous roles. Yet, nowhere was it sensible to give a Process and a Function a one-to-one relationship. For example, the Technical Support Group played a total of five roles and participated in all three of the processes. Likewise, the Service Level Manager stepped out of the Service Level Management Process to participate in Change Management activities.