



## What the %\$#\$& is a Service Request?

Discussions about the difference between Incidents and Service Requests are as old as ITIL. And they are not resolved until the errors in ITIL have been resolved.

ITIL simply is not a fully integrated implementable quality management system. It's a series of practices (good or best, and sometimes rather inconsistent and even a little bit stupid). So please try to think out-of-the-\$#%^&&%#-ITIL-box here!

In a recent discussion at the ITSM Portal forum, I again ran into this question. Let me discuss my view with you.

The forum topic was: what is the difference between incidents and service requests. Then the terms change, problem and event enter the discussion, and we're lost as always.

As the Skeptic says, all of these [incidents, changes, service requests] are responses. Each response leads to a specific workflow, a set of actions. Unfortunately the Skeptic is dead wrong when he says "Splitting them up is just a silly historical artifact".

Actually, there are very serious differences between these workflows. Even the target of each workflow is different:

- a **change** needs to resolve something (a wish from a user) without disturbing the as-is situation. Therefore Change Management is focused at decision points. Note: there's nothing 'wrong', a change is initiated by a wish.
- an **incident** needs to be restored as soon as possible (or agreed). Therefore Incident Management is focused at restoring a functionality, no matter how that is done (workaround or real fix).
- a **service request** needs to be resolved according to plan, to satisfy the need of a customer (internal or external). But it is an action directly at the operational information system. Therefore the process is focused at preventing conflicts with other actions and maintaining the agreed service levels. Therefore the process is focused at planning, and at using the right operational procedures. Note: like with the change, there is nothing 'wrong', a service request is a wish from a user.

Each of these workflows relates to a different process. An RFC leads to Change Management, an incident leads to Incident Management, and a SR leads to... yes: to Operations Management.

Unfortunately, ITIL has not documented the Operations Management process in a clear way. That's because ITIL doesn't aim to be an implementable management system with a consistent process model. So please stop treating it as such!

The ITIL term "service request" is actually a rather unfortunate term. A service is defined as something completely different from what an SR is all about.... After all, the SR only provides some minor component of a SERVICE. Therefore it is very important to use a clear definition of the terms we use. The various versions of the ITIL dictionaries do not provide the required clear definition system.

A better system would be:

**Change** - Modification to a service or a service component.

**Incident** - Any event that is not part of the standard operation of a service and that causes an interruption to, or a reduction in, the quality of that service. An incident can be resolved by either a Service Request or a Change.

**Service Request** - Request from a user for support, delivery, information, advice or documentation, not being a failure in the IT infrastructure.

**Event** - A situation indicated by a defined signal or data. If a specific threshold is crossed, the event leads to an incident.

**Problem** - Condition with an unknown underlying cause that may give rise to one or more incidents.

### Standard changes and service requests

Sometimes a service request is explained to be a simple, standard change. This is not a smart move. It will cause you big problems in terms of your definition system. A change is a change and a service request is not a change.



**By definition.** A standard change is still a change, even though it's processed in a standardized format. In a change, you can trigger one or more service requests. If you use clean processes, you can integrate the Change Management process and the Operations Management process in a very efficient and effective way: all operational activities are then executed in the Operations Management process. This way, changes and service requests are completely separated but related mechanisms, making it very simple to manage both in an integrated way.

**Service Requests refer to an agreed service**

One last important characteristic of a service request: A Service Request is something that a user is entitled to. Therefore this right should be documented in the agreed service (the SLA). The delivery time, the specification of the deliverable, the cost of the deliverable, all of these should be documented, so they can easily be planned and delivered in the Operations Management process. In practice, you'll find many SR's in a service catalogue....