Problem Management (PM) is one of the components in the ITIL Service Support area. The primary focus of PM is to identify causes of service issues and commission corrective work to prevent recurrences. PM processes are both reactive and proactive - reactive in solving problems in response to incidents, and proactive in identifying and solving potential incidents before they occur.

**Step 1: Define Roles and Responsibilities**

There should be a designated Problem Manager whose responsibility is to identify problems during daily operations as well as through historical reporting that shows recurring incidents. Depending on the size of your organization, this may not be a full time job, but is a necessary role. Additionally, the Service Desk Manager should be in direct communication with the Problem Manager, as he or she will likely be the first alerted when a cluster of Critical or High Priority incidents are opened.

The primary objectives of Problem Management are:
1) To uncover a diagnosis of the root cause of the problem
2) To provide either a temporary fix or workaround to the problem
3) To control the error by leaving the fix in place or permanently repairing the condition

**Sample Problem Management Process**

TechExcel ServiceWise includes a graphical workflow editor. With this editor, organizations may ‘draw’ their process into place. To the right is an example of how an organization might choose to implement the problem management process.

**Step 2: Focus on Root Cause**

Create a documented process for Root Cause Analysis that describes what techniques will be used. These can include brainstorming, Ishikawa diagrams, Causal Mapping or any other technique that successfully uncovers the underlying cause. This process should be “group think”, and the group composed of representatives from any possible area of breakdown.

**Tip:**
Schedule regular incident reviews. Create a weekly meeting to review all incidents where the root cause was not removed.

**Step 3: Make a “Known Error” Known**

Once a root cause and a workaround are in place, a problem becomes a “known error.” The workaround should be communicated to all end-users who have submitted an incident and the incidents placed in a “resolved” status. The Problem record should be in a “known error” status. Additionally, the known error and workaround should be published to the knowledgebase for resolution at the Service Desk. Continue to open related incidents as reported and link them to the problem record, but if the published workaround has been implemented with the end-user, the newly related incidents should be in a “resolved” state. This should stop SLA calculations against the incidents, but will not allow full closure until the problem is resolved and closed. Once the environment has calmed down and productivity restored to the end-users through the workaround, Problem Managers must decide if permanently fixing the root cause is economically viable or if the workaround should become permanent.

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Step 4: Weigh the ROI
If the return on investment (ROI) for repairing a root cause will not be achievable in six months, consider leaving the workaround in place. If the repair of the root cause is feasible or necessary regardless of length of ROI, the Problem Manager and assignees may have to initiate a Request for Change (RFC). This change record is governed by the Change Management process and the same way incidents are linked to problems, a problem should be linked to the RFC. When the RFC is successfully implemented and closes, it will in turn allow the Problem record to be closed and any associated incidents will be closed.

Step 5: Focus on Root Cause
Don’t automatically close Problem records when an RFC is complete. They should be reviewed by the Problem Manager to assure that any workaround in place is backed out, if necessary, in order to effectively use the changed configuration item. Additionally, this allows for total contact ownership and customer satisfaction.

Step 6: Be Customer-centric
Focus on customers, not infrastructure. The tendency is to focus on the most troublesome infrastructure. However, the goal of effective IT Service Management is to focus on customers. To this end, Problem Managers should sort recurring incidents by line of business and address the business unit with the most issues.

1) Many users/customers lose their email connectivity and submit incidents
2) The Service Desk Manager alerts the Problem Manager and a problem record is opened and assigned to a technical resource (assignee) with the incidents linked to it
3) The root cause is determined to be a particular Exchange server that has a bad internal power supply
4) The workaround is to temporarily reconfigure any end-user of that server to use another Exchange server
5) The Problem Manager/assignee initiates an Emergency Change Request and gets the okay to reconfigure
6) The workaround is distributed to the users/customers with incidents as well as any other users of the server who have not yet contacted the Service Desk
7) Linked incidents are put into a resolved state
8) The workaround and associated problem number are distributed to the Service Desk for any new callers
9) The Problem Manager/assignee determines the cost of the new power supply and repair can be recovered in 1 month.
10) The Problem Manager initiates a Request for Change (RFC) to repair the Exchange Server
11) The RFC goes through the Change Management process and is successfully implemented. The last task of this change is to return the end-users to the original Exchange Server
12) The Problem Manager is notified of the successful change and closes the problem
13) The associated incidents are either closed or, if the company practices Total Contact Ownership, the users/customers are contacted by the Service Desk to verify that they have changed back to the original server and they are satisfied that the incident can be closed.