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Understanding Key IT Service Management Terms

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Introduction

IT service management relies on clear processes and well-defined terminology. Two important concepts used in service management are Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and Configuration Items (CIs). Understanding these terms helps teams manage services effectively, track responsibilities, and improve support processes.

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Service Level Agreement (SLA)

A Service Level Agreement (SLA) is an agreement that defines the expected level of service between a service provider and a customer. It sets clear targets for areas such as response times, resolution times, and service availability.

SLAs help ensure that everyone understands the expected standards of service and provide a way to measure whether those expectations are being met.

For example, a support team may have an SLA stating that high priority tickets must receive a response within one hour and be resolved within eight hours.

Common SLA measurements

- Response time: The amount of time allowed before a support team responds to a request.
- Resolution time: The amount of time allowed before an issue should be resolved.
- Escalation: The process of raising an issue when it is at risk of missing its agreed target.

Example

A ticket breaches its SLA because it was not resolved within the agreed resolution time.

Configuration Item (CI)

A Configuration Item (CI) is any component that needs to be managed to deliver a service. A CI can be hardware, software, a system, a service, or another component that has relationships with other items.

Configuration Items are often stored in a Configuration Management Database (CMDB), which helps organisations understand what components exist and how they relate to each other.

For example, a company may record a server as a Configuration Item so it can be linked to the applications it hosts, the services it supports, and any incidents or changes that affect it.

Common examples of Configuration Items

- Servers
- Applications
- Network devices

- Business services
- Databases
- Software licences

Related concepts

- Asset: A resource owned or managed by an organisation.
- CMDB (Configuration Management Database): A database used to store information about Configuration Items and their relationships.
- Dependency: A relationship showing how one component relies on another.
- Change Management: The process of managing modifications to services or systems.

How SLAs and Configuration Items Work Together

SLAs and Configuration Items often work together as part of IT service management processes.

For example, if a server supporting a critical business service experiences an issue, the related Configuration Item can help identify the affected service. The SLA can then determine how quickly the support team needs to respond and resolve the issue.

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By tracking both service expectations and the components that support those services, organisations can improve visibility, accountability, and service reliability.