# FTF: What Is It, and Why Track It in the First Place?

By Renée Mineart

Many organizations monitor their service desk's first-time fix rate, using it as a measure of performance—so much so that many service desks' success or failure is based largely upon this metric. While, in many cases, it is not a measure of performance at all, it can still be of value, once it is properly understood and applied (to the entire IT department, incidentally, not just the service desk).

Historically, when there was a fault with a user's IT equipment, he picked up the phone and called the service desk. The person on the other end of the phone took down the details of the problem and passed it onto a technician, who visited the user at his desk to fix the problem.

Over time, the people answering the phone gained greater technical skills and began resolving problems while the user was still on the phone. In part, this shift was the result of a new way of thinking brought about by ITIL, but it was also the result of organizations realizing that it is quicker, and thus cheaper, to fix faults remotely than to send a technician to resolve it at the user's desk. Companies began tracking how many calls were fixed while the user was still on the phone with the analysts, as they were no longer merely dispatchers or call loggers. With that, the first-time fix rate metric was born.

However, technology has moved on. Users are no longer restricted to using the phone to report their IT faults. They can use email, self-service portals, Facebook, Twitter, and text messages, to name but a few means of communication. So how does one measure first-time fix (FTF) when there is no call? And does one need to? The short answer is yes.

## The Maybe Box

First-time fix is an important measurement, when taken correctly and for the right purpose. However, if taken wrongly, it returns misleading information. But to understand this, we first need to break the calls down into their logical groups.

All incidents logged by the service desk fall into one of three boxes:







Let's start with the Yes and No boxes, as they are easy to explain. First off, there are a couple of absolutes in these boxes. In the Yes box, everyone on the service desk must have both the ability (skills) and the authority (access rights) to resolve the incident. This means that no matter who answers the phone, that issue can be resolved remotely. A Yes incident might be a simple password reset. This is going to be one of the first things you train new service desk staff to do, so anyone and everyone on the desk will be able to do that, and it is clearly something that can be done remotely.

The same is true for the No box. There are issues within IT that are not, technically, resolvable remotely. For either security, complexity, or other reasons, these are best left in the hands of the second or third tier. Therefore, no one on the service desk has the ability or authority to resolve them. A classic example of a No incident would be a faulty monitor. You are going to have to send a technician to the user's desk to resolve it, so there is no way this can be an FTF. Another No might be a complicated reassignment of folder permissions. This is often left to the network administrators, as getting it wrong can cause major problems.

The Maybe box is more interesting. Service desk staffs are rarely composed of individuals with the same level of expertise. So you will have some people who can do things that other people cannot, and there will always be Maybe calls—incidents that if received by person X could be resolved right away, but that person Y does not know how to resolve. This is the box that, as a manager, you want to constantly be watching and trying to improve.

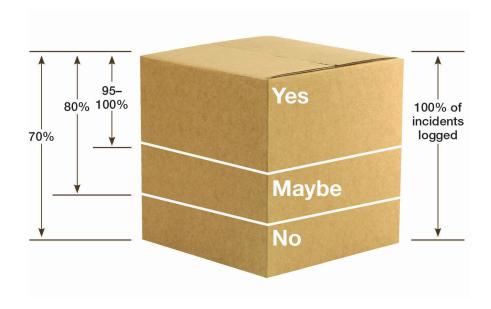
There will also be calls in the Maybe box that should have been answered the first time, but were not because there is no clear process in place for passing that knowledge onto the service desk. The Maybe box is the box of maturity for the service desk, but we'll get to that in a bit.

#### The FTF Conundrum

So, we have established that all of the incidents logged by the service desk fall into one of three boxes: Yes, Maybe, or No.

Yes incidents can and should logged and resolved right away (FTF 95–100%). There might be occasions when they cannot be resolved promptly (a call-volume spike, perhaps), but in general, if the incident can be fixed remotely, it should be, and if possible, while the user is on the phone. Conversely, No incidents can never be fixed remotely, and will always be assigned to second- or third-tier staff.

But, if your KPIs measure FTF on 100 percent of the incidents logged by the service desk, as shown below—even those assigned to the second or third tier, even those No calls you can never fix remotely—are you actually measuring your team's ability to resolve calls?



Looking at the diagram above: If the 70 percent KPI is set against 100 percent of the calls being logged by the service desk (Yes, Maybe, and No boxes), and we know that a certain percentage—say, 20 percent of those calls—are going to go to the second tier because they cannot be resolved remotely, are you actually measuring performance? Or are you just measuring the types of calls you are logging?

If you pulled back the KPI, and measured only the Yes and Maybe calls (filtering out the definite No calls), you would then be measuring your service desk's maturity. This might increase your KPI to 80 percent—maybe 85 percent, for argument's sake—depending on how many new staff you have on your desk, and the complexity of the incidents you are receiving.

By measuring only the Yes and Maybe calls, you would be able to identify the types of incidents that can/cannot be resolved remotely, and which incidents could be resolved remotely if your team had additional access rights. There might be legitimate reasons why they do not have those rights, but it may just be the case that no one has ever asked. With this measurement, you might also be able to identify which staff require additional training. This is your Maybe box, your service desk's maturity. A more mature service desk can do more, can close more calls the first time.

Finally, if you pull back the measurement a little further, and only measure the Yes calls—only those calls you can close remotely—then, and only then, are you measuring performance. Any measure of an activity outside of your control is not a measure of performance. Only when you measure what you can do are you measuring performance.

# **Modern Technology**

So now, what do we do with those calls that come in via email, Twitter, Facebook, or the self-service portal? How do we log and track them as an FTF? Is it even possible?

Yes, and it is a pretty simple solution. The trick here is to write the SLA in such a way that it is capable of keeping up with technology. If the SLA is based on phone calls, it will only work when our customers use the phone to log a call. Consider this alternative: "Any call logged, and resolved by the service desk within ten minutes is classed as a first-time fix." That SLA bypasses the dependence on technology, and allows for any means of communication with your user base. It is also easier to track and report in your service management tool, because the only data you need to pull is when a call was logged and resolved within ten minutes by the service desk.

### FTF: The Bigger Picture

Now that we are correctly measuring FTF, what do we do with this information? An FTF rate of 70 percent, for example, is a good target, but it needs to be a target for the whole IT department, and not a measure of performance for the service desk alone. Furthermore, when a call is fixed by second- or third-tier staff and it could have been resolved at the service desk, there needs to be a simple process in place whereby the person who resolved the call can transfer her knowledge to the service desk. This improves the maturity of the service desk and increases the number of calls that can be fixed the first time.

In a perfect world, a fully mature service desk has no Maybe box, and all calls that can be resolved remotely are resolved at the first time. But this must be the responsibility of everyone in IT if the organization expects to reduce costs, increase customer satisfaction, and improve performance.

Renée Mineart owns and operates a consultancy business in the United Kingdom where she specializes in managing and setting up service desks.