

# Schrödinger's Service Desk – is it alive or dead, or evolving..?

#KISS2025 - Copenhagen

**BARCLAY RAE**

**1<sup>st</sup> October 2025**



**WANTED  
DEAD & ALIVE**

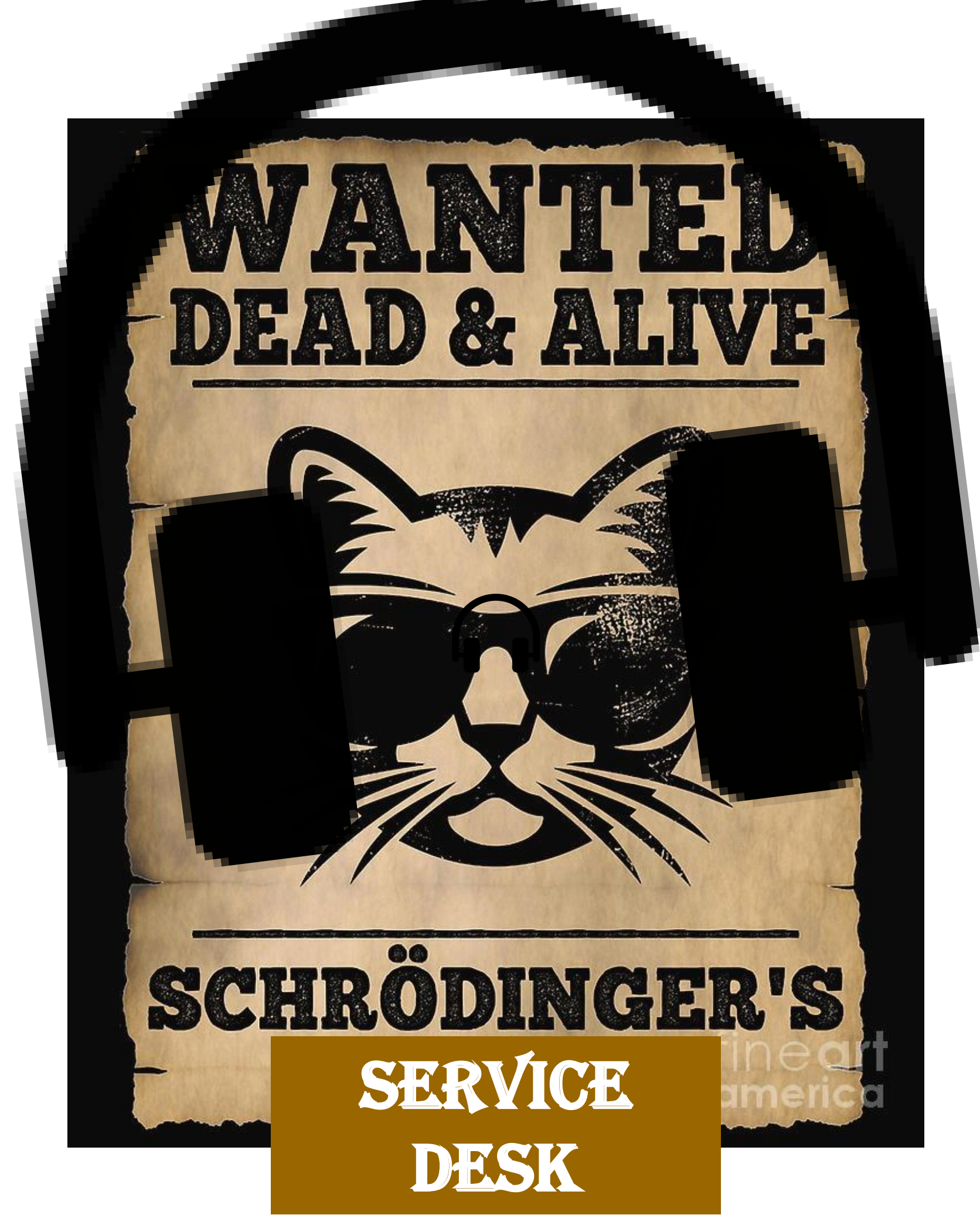
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**SCHRÖDINGER'S  
CAT**

fineart  
america



**SERVICE  
DESK**

## Is the IT Service Desk dead, alive, or somewhere in between?

With AI, automation, and DevOps challenging traditional models, many predict its demise.

Yet, service desks remain essential, still managing vast workloads and maintaining vital customer relationships.

Human-centred design, experience management, and enterprise-wide service strategies are redefining the service desk.

As tools evolve and new capabilities emerge, what roles, skills, and structures will the future demand?

# Presenter – Barclay Rae

**ITSM Consultant and author since 1994**

**Over 700 Service Transformation Projects across all sectors**

- Managing Director **BRC** – Barclay Rae Consulting Ltd
- ITIL4 architect team – co-author *ITIL Practitioner, ITIL4 Foundation*
- Lead Editor *ITIL4 Create Deliver and Support*
- itSMF UK Paul Rappaport lifetime achievement 2023
- itSMF UK CEO 2015 – 18, Director 2015 – 2020
- SDI associate, auditor
- Co-author *SDI Service Desk Certification standard*
- Author of *ITSM Goodness*
- Senior Advisor, ITIL, PeopleCert
- Service Management Principal (UK), CDW
- HDI top 25 ‘Thought Leader’



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# About BRC...

**Since 2010 – independent advisory**

Service Management consulting and advisory  
ITSM and ESM, leadership, delivery and management

Workshops, simulations, consulting, auditing, education  
Service transformation projects

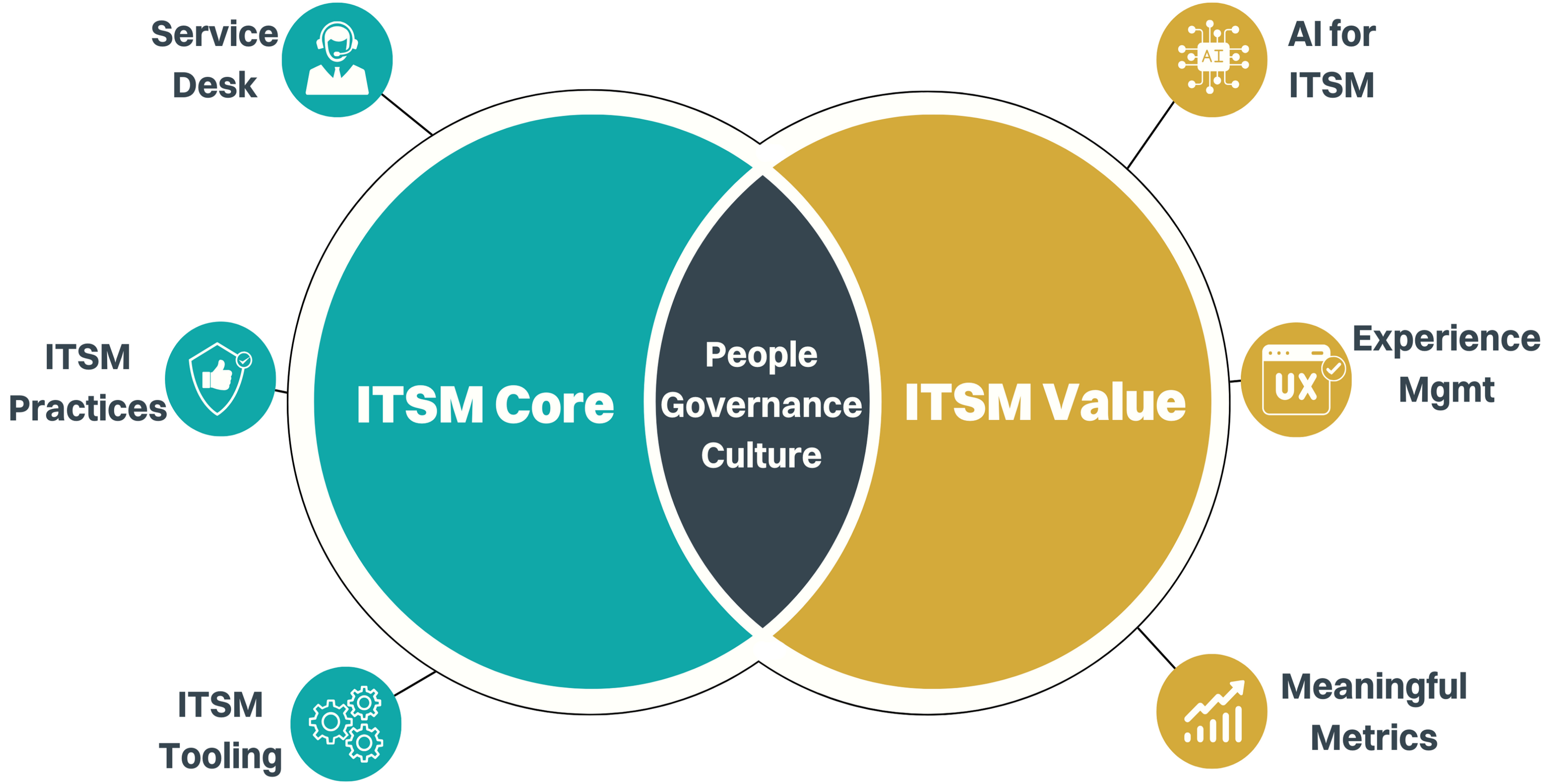


Affiliate  
Partner

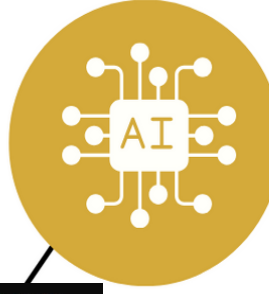
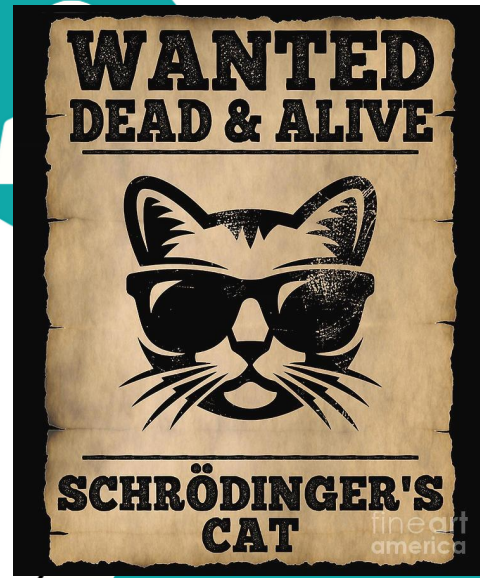


PeopleCert™  
All talents, certified.



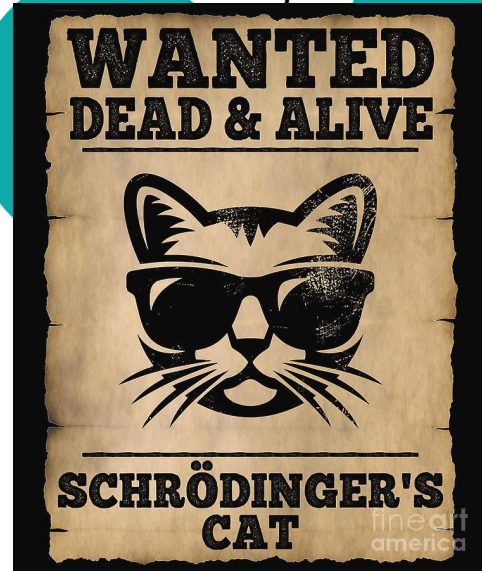


Service Desk



AI for ITSM

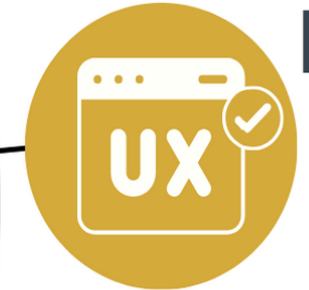
ITSM Practices



TSM Core

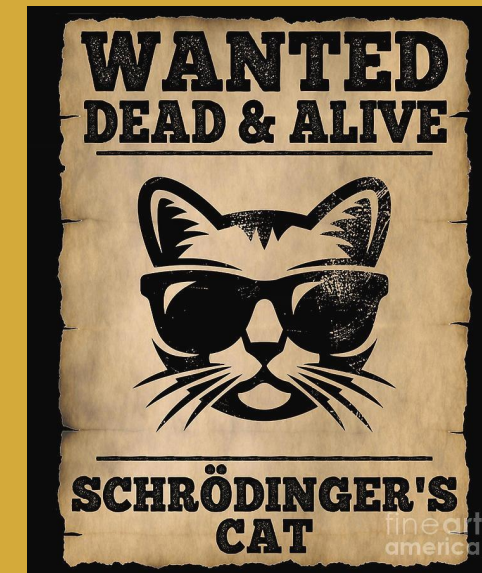
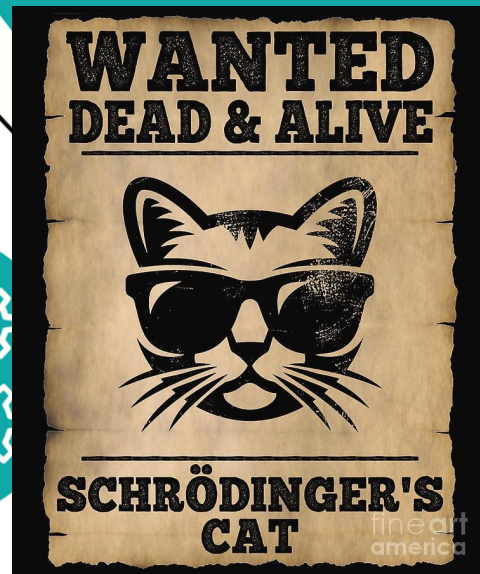


ITSM Value



Experience Mgmt

ITSM Tooling



Meaningful Metrics



BARCLAYRAE Consulting Ltd

# Agenda

Is the Service Desk dead or alive..?

Service Desk:

Past

Present

Future

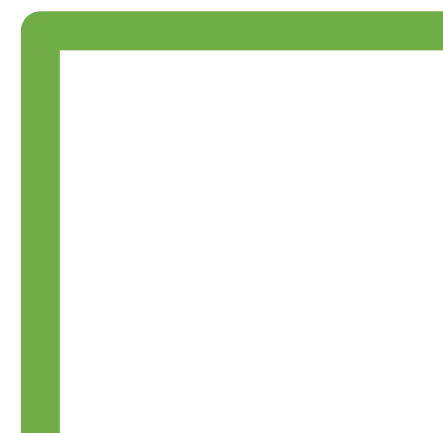
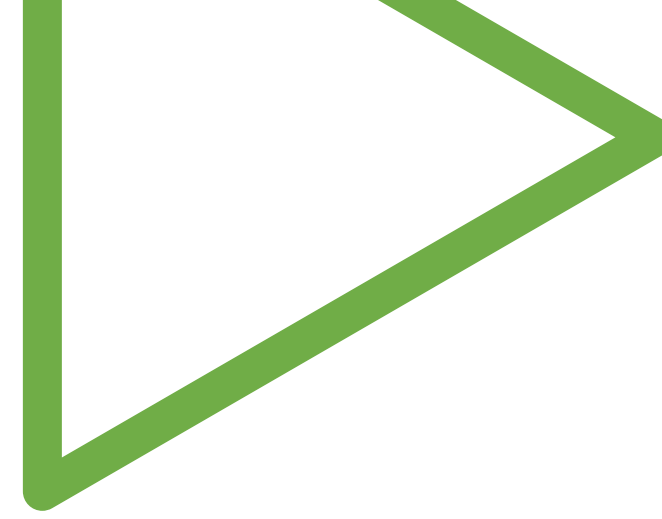
Automation, AI - tech vs. human

Its right there in front of you

Summary



# Dead or alive..?



# Dead or Alive..?

*“Service desk is irrelevant now”*

*“ITIL and ITSM are dead”*

*“We don’t need those people now”*

*“AI can handle the issues”*

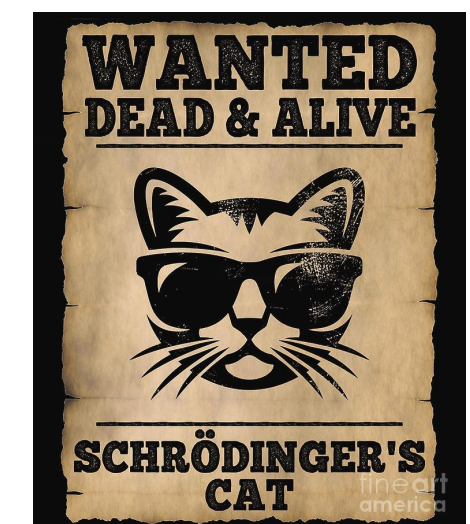
*“Devops replaced ITSM ages ago”*

*“Break-fix isn’t needed any more”*

*“XLAs have replaced SLAs and the old ways of managing support”*

*“We only need technical people to manage support and ops”*

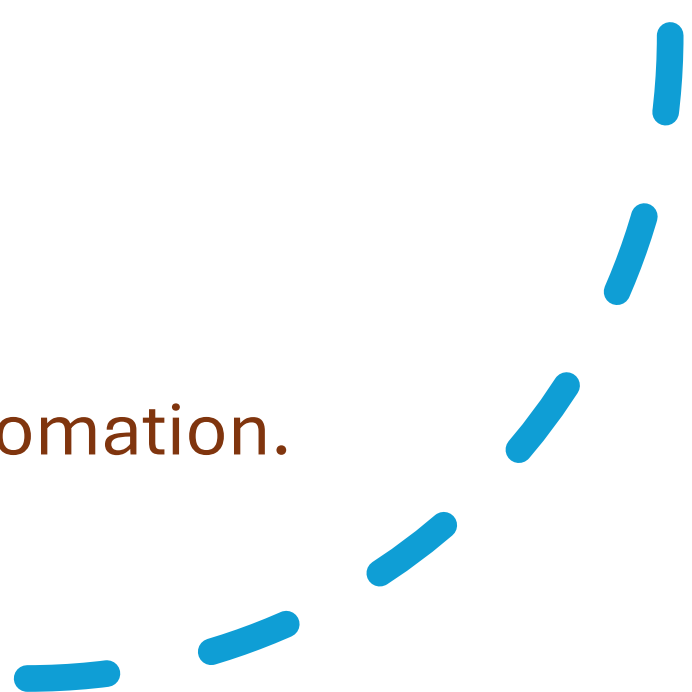
*“The future is touch-less support”*



# Recent Research Findings

- AI and automation reduce routine tickets but complement—not replace—humans.
- Only 55% of employees feel fully supported by current desks (*Forrester, 2024*).
- Just ~1% of organisations are mature in AI deployment (*McKinsey, 2024*).
- Complement effect of AI skills up to 50% larger than substitution effect (*Arxiv, 2024*).
- UK public sector: 22% using AI, 16% fear replacement (*Arxiv, 2024*).

## Risks and Challenges

- Adoption and maturity remain mixed.
  - Skills gaps in AI, ML, and empathy.
  - Trust, ethics, and privacy risks from over-automation.
- 

# Implications for the Service Desk

## **Operating models are shifting:**

From reactive, tiered escalation → proactive, swarmed, AI-enabled models.

## **Roles redefined:**

AI supervisors, exception specialists, knowledge engineers, relationship/experience managers, DEX analysts.

## **Metrics shift:**

From traditional ITSM and SLAs to Employee/Digital Experience (EX/DEX), plus Experience Management and XLAs.



# Existential state...Service Desk

*Estimated number of IT Help/Service desks operating globally:*  
**0.5 million to 2.0 million\***

*Estimated number of people working in IT Help/Service desks globally:*  
**20 – 25 million\***



*Help/Service desk industry globally:*  
**279,000 vendors\***

*ITSM / Service Desk Market size*  
**\$20- \$30BN\***

*\*There is no central register of this.*

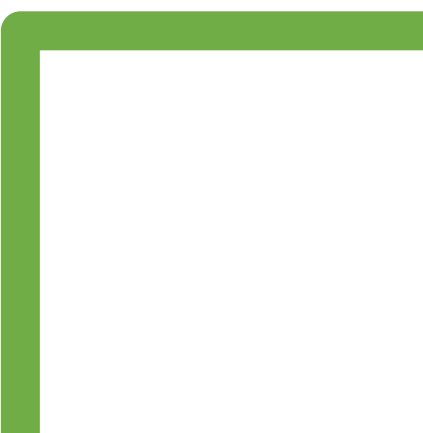
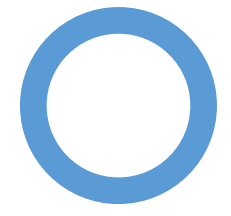
*Sources: FMI, EC, SDI, Gartner, onetoonline.org, workwise, CompTIA, Cognitivemarketresearch.com*



**Existential state...Service Desk**

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# Service Desk – past, present, future



# Service Desk – past



# Service Desk Past...

## 80s - 90s

- Set up to save money..?
- Vendor driven
- 'Un-helpful desk'
- The least technical people
- Low rates and grades
- Not connected / supported
- Limited ITSM
- Lack of trust and respect
- Tools barely applied
- No useable data

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## 2000s – 10s

- ITIL !!
- More integration
- Tools still unused
- Improving grades / salaries
- Functional SLAs
- Watermelon reports
- Growing professionalism
- Initial benchmarking and certification
- Limited cross functional working
- Limited improvements in image

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- Toxic chaos

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## 2010 – 2020s

- Covid! - Strong user PR
- Portals, self service and Catalog
- Shift left working
- Improved outputs and analysis
- More surveys and feedback
- Automation/AI tools
- ITSM / SD integration
- Trying to make knowledge management work
- Career structure
- Improved roles, grades and image – respect even



## Service Desk – present

# Service Desk Present

- Great progress on core practices with AI and DEX – Problem and Knowledge management really working..!
- High levels of level 1 and level 0 resolution
- Automation and AI capability and awareness
- Service Desk central to projects, BRM, design and transition
- Experience Management and DEX deliver value via Service Desk
- Service Desk value appreciated by many businesses
- In person/face to face/walk-up areas now prevalent and liked
- High levels of maturity and capability
- Positive levels of advocacy, good PR and respect – success recognition





# Service Desk – Future

# Automation, AI - tech vs. human



# Automation, AI

Automation is key to improve service quality and help remove technical debt

Automation can be seen e.g. in request management where manual and error prone tasks can be managed more quickly.

This also frees up people to do more useful and interesting work



# Automation, AI - Bots

Chatbots are still years away from being fully effective in e.g. IT Service Desks

***Consider the complexity of diagnosis, logging, Escalation and human interaction***



# Automation, AI - RPA

Automation is useful in very specific areas – e.g. to manage large call queues, triage, routing etc.

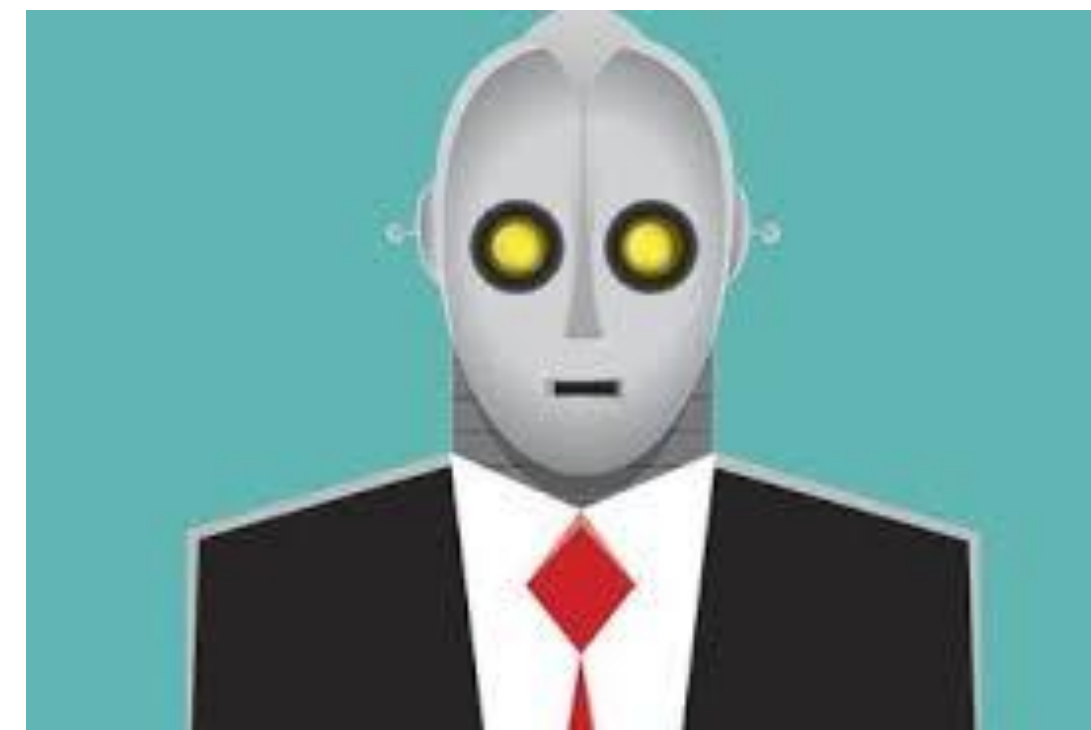
***Effective RPA can be less than 5% of a process***



# Data Quality

Any RPA/AI/Robotics and automation requires excellent data quality – knowledge, configuration management etc.

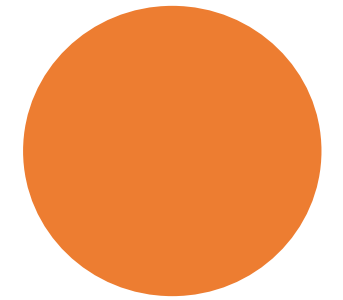
***Most IT organisations are not ready with this...***



# People Skills...!

With more potential automation the scope for human interaction is reduced and this also means that actual interactions between people must be ***excellent***.

Many of the issues that we face still rely on people, relationships and business focus, and no robot can ever be expected to deliver this.



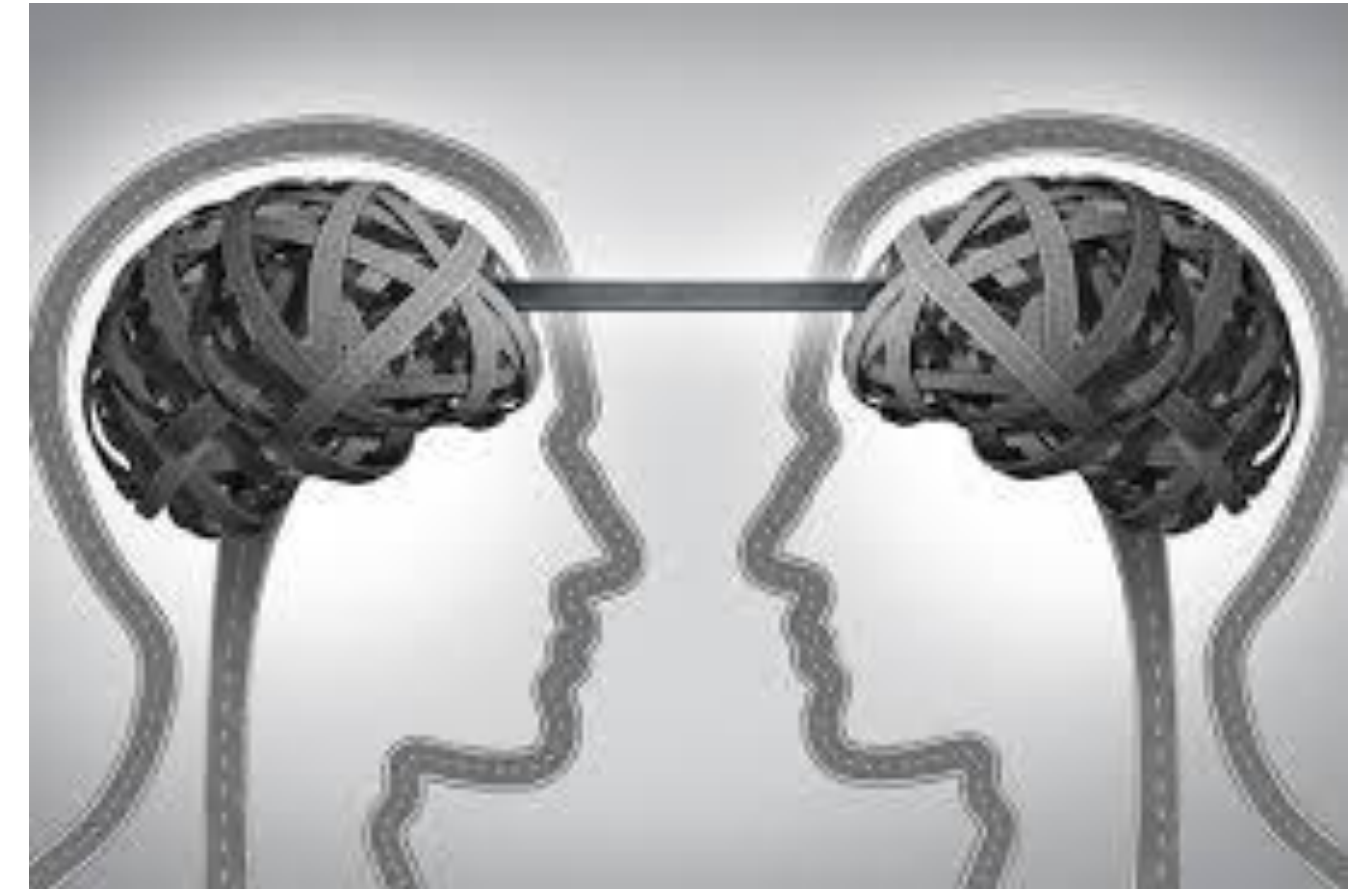
# Supporting people...

We support **people** not just technology

Success depends on our ability to interact productively, positively and professionally with people

This involves collaboration:

- Between people
- Across teams and IT departments
- Beyond IT departments
- With partners



# Skills and competencies

We need to develop people - not simply expect frameworks and tools to deliver success

IT professionals must develop a broad set of skills and competencies – including new skills



# Soft or Hard?

We talk about 'soft' skills –  
as if these were easy, fluffy, inferior, or unimportant



# Soft Skills...?!

- Relationship building
- Maintaining customer focus
- Delivering great communications skills
- Demonstrating business skills and knowledge
- Building a successful business case
- Understanding and managing risk
- Influencing and motivating difficult/resistant people
- Dealing professionally with varied customer issues
- Standing up to experienced technical people
- Being able to calm down angry/difficult people
- Achieving agreement on difficult issues
- Keeping up to date on new developments
- Procuring/negotiating contracts
- Managing budgets/finance
- Being positive and resourceful



# Human skills....

## Problem Solving



Identify relationships and create solutions to problems

## Critical Thinking



Provide insights based on data, interconnectivity and complexity

## Collaboration



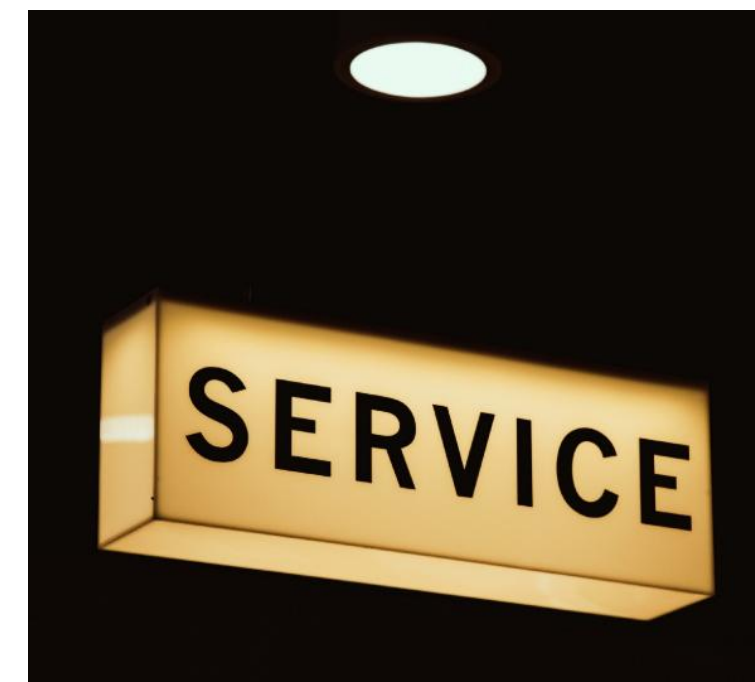
Communicate and work with others across functions and industries

## Emotional Intelligence



Empathy and curiosity

## Service Orientation



Providing value to customers in the form of services

# Service Management Skills

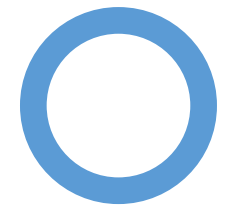
Organisations need to invest in hiring a wider range of people and skillsets for successful IT

New skills and people are needed for commercial negotiation, contracts, relationship management, commercial and financial management

IT Service Management is transferrable to wider enterprise operations and management



**Its right there in front of you**



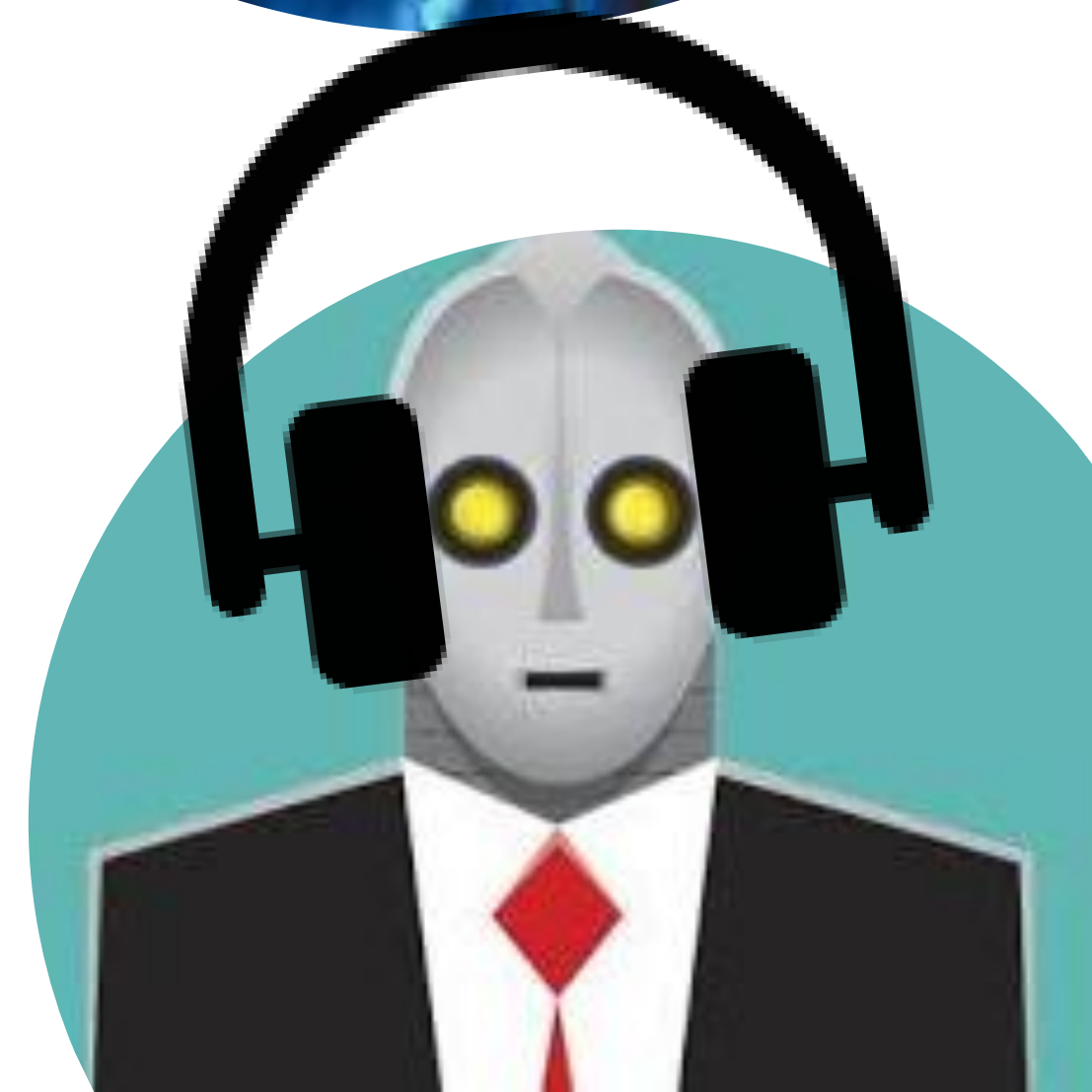
# Service Desk is a centre for people and technical Skills

**Human Centred Support**

**Experience Management**

**People and communications**

**Problem solving**



# Human skills... Service Desk skills..!!

## Problem Solving



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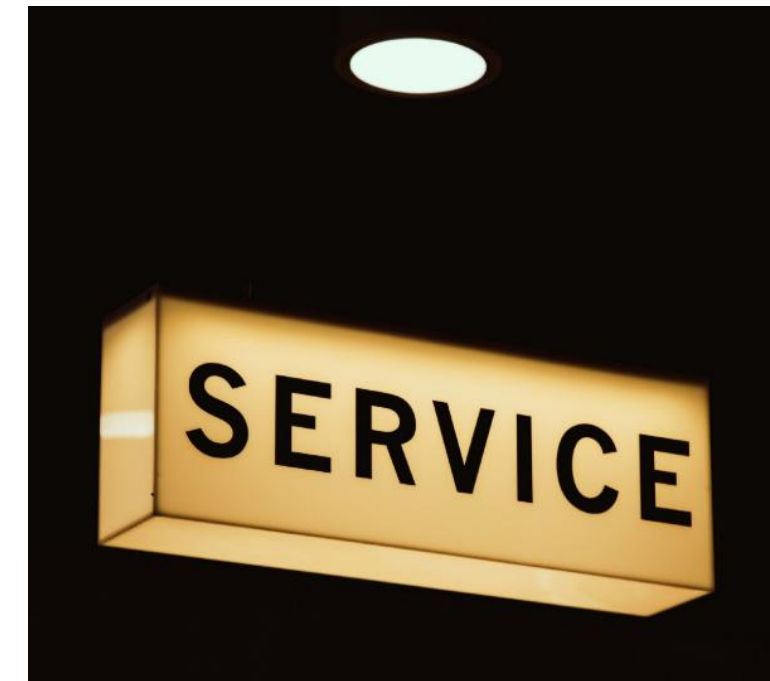
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# Summary



# Recommendations

Redesign service desk as a business and people enabling service

Adopt a multi layered support model - self-service / AI / biz and tech specialists

Invest in reskilling (AI, data, e-IQ/Stakeholder management, communications, governance, business)

Develop new tech pathways with new service desk model

Embed governance, ethics, and security into AI practices

Pilot, measure, and scale AI adoption gradually

# Enablers...

People skills and development

Ai and Automation

Integrated Product and Service Management

Enterprise Service Management / Digital Transformation

Target Operating Model

Experience Management – DEX, XLA

Problem Management, knowledge management  
– the game changers



# Summary

Service Desk is still very much **alive!!**

Some aspects of the function are changing and will disappear / be re-invented with AI and automation

The value of service desk is in people, experience and business management

The opportunity is to grow and evolve the capability as a human centric capability

**It's right there in front of us...**



# THANK YOU

## Mange Tak

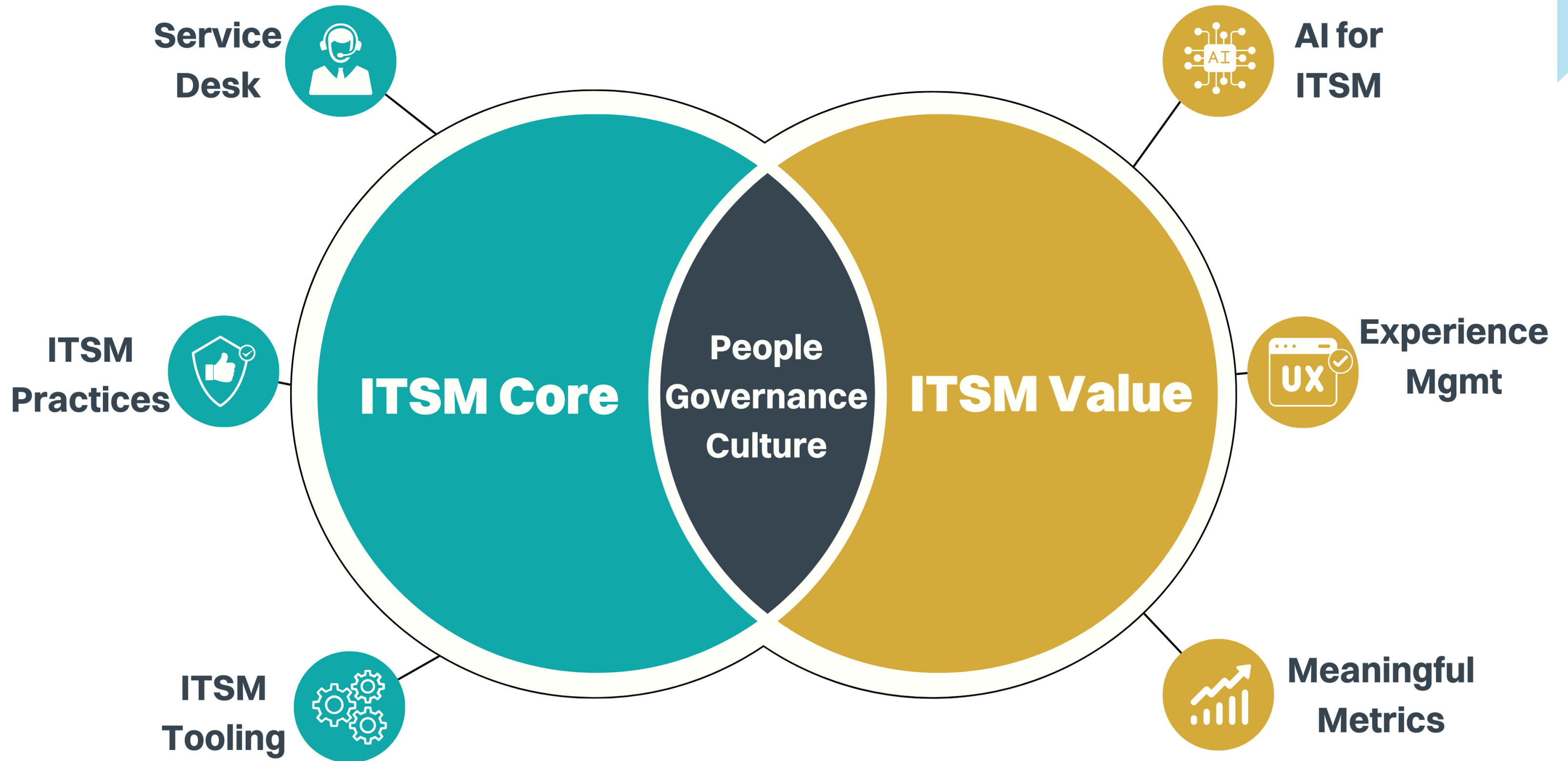
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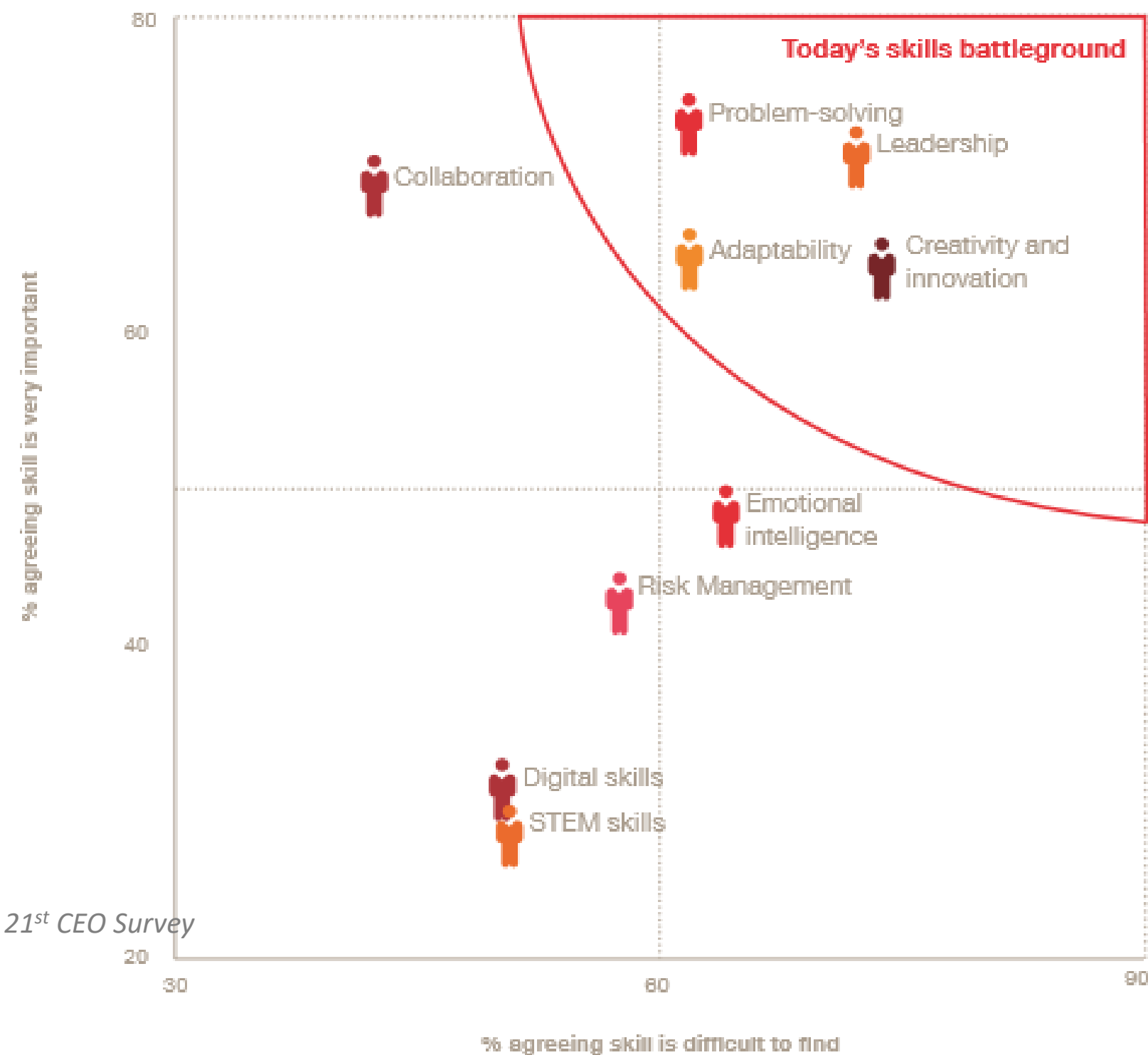
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# Developing the right skills – employers



Can you hire the perfect employee, or do you create the perfect employee?