

Hidden Impacts to Your Major Incident Management Process

How keeping stakeholders informed
can compromise incident resolution

Do Stakeholders Really Impact Incident Resolution?

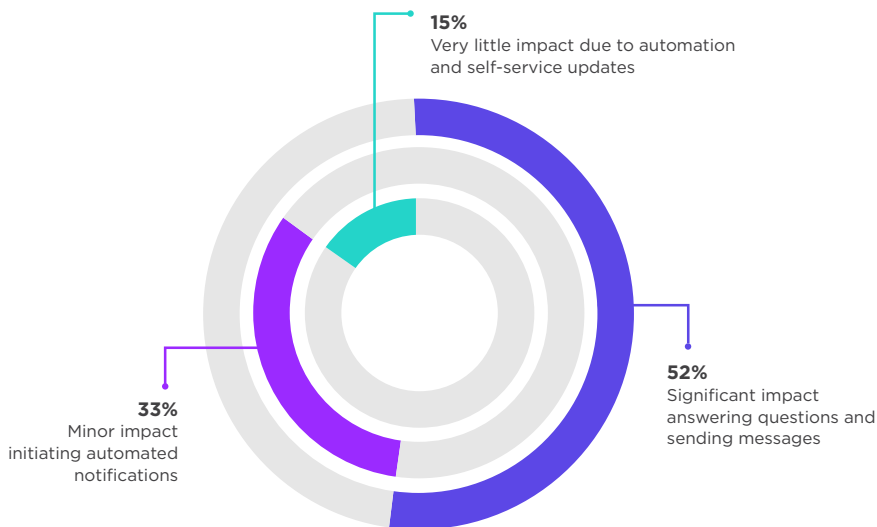
When we talk about major incident management, we talk about the path from the critical event to its discovery to resolution. But while resolution teams are fixing the car and getting it back on the road, they have other responsibilities to deal with that can impact their ability to resolve issues quickly. Chief among them is keeping non-essential stakeholders informed.

In a 2018 survey of 767 IT professionals, the data showed that incident response has improved since 2016. The impact of keeping stakeholders informed continues to be an issue, but it goes largely undocumented because resolution teams don't recognize it as part of the resolution process.

The Pain of Keeping Stakeholders Informed

We know that keeping stakeholders informed is a pain point because survey respondents told us so. In fact, only 15% said keeping stakeholders informed had “very little impact,” compared to 52% that said it had “significant impact.”

How much impact does keeping stakeholders informed have on your major incident management process?



The pain is real: More than half of survey respondents said keeping stakeholders informed during a major incident has a significant impact on their major incident management processes.

Incident resolution teams are better than ever at identifying and engaging the right person to start working the issue. What's different about keeping stakeholders informed? To seek the answers to that question, the survey asked how resolution teams are communicating with non-essential stakeholders.

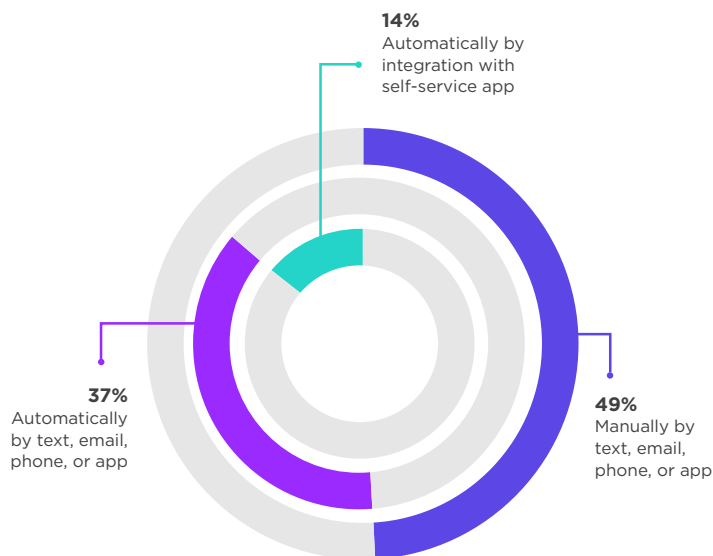
How Automation Impacts Stakeholder Communication

Every industry is moving toward automating as many processes as possible, and certain steps of the incident resolution process are not exception. When it comes to informing stakeholders, however, about half still use manual methods, which obviously takes extra time.

How do you inform stakeholders such as executives and customers?

Communications to different people require varying levels of detail. For instance, notifications to incident resolution teams need to be as technically detailed as necessary, while updates to customers and executives usually involve more of a summary overview and estimated time to recovery.

So copying and pasting from notifications to resolutions teams won't suffice to stakeholders, requiring unique content, which takes still more time.



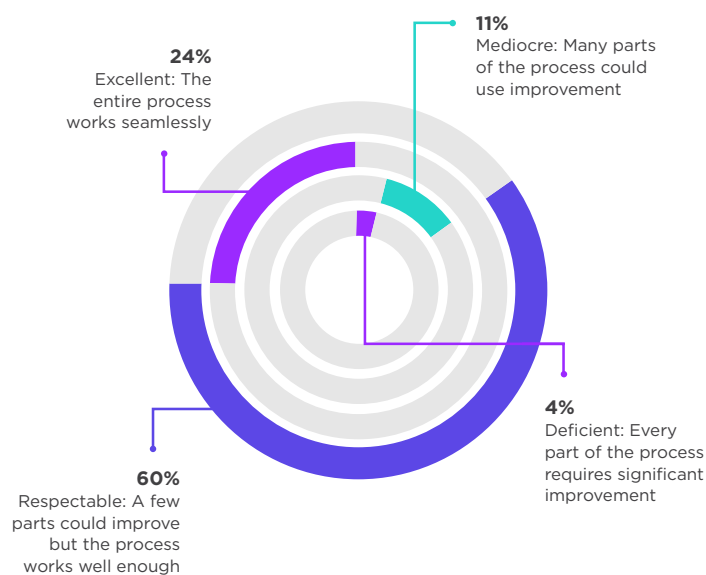
Effect of automation: Only 14% automate communications to stakeholders through integrations with a self-service app.

Comparing stakeholder communication to incident management effectiveness

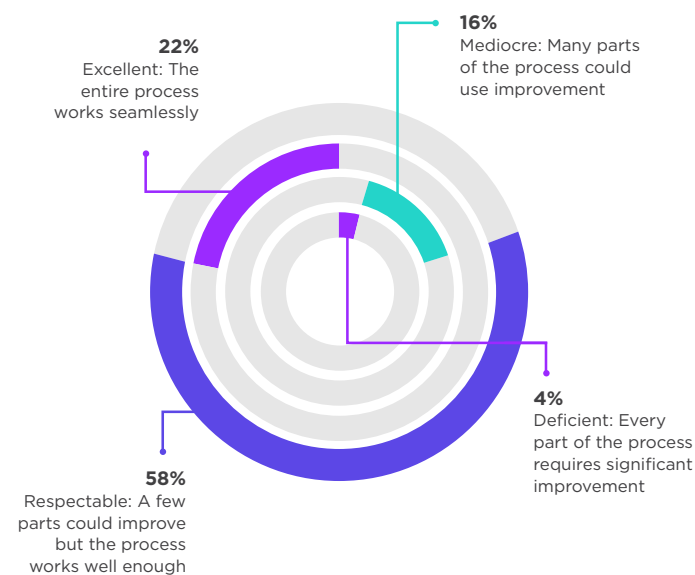
The IT professionals in our survey have already confirmed that keeping stakeholders aligned has a significant impact. So it seems logical that the impact should show up when we run a cross-section analysis between incident management effectiveness and the impact of keeping stakeholders aligned.

Interestingly, the data did not match up very well. In fact, the impact of stakeholder alignment shows virtually no effect on how survey respondents assess their major incident management process.

How would you describe the effectiveness of your major incident management process?



IT professionals who keep stakeholders informed manually



IT professionals who keep stakeholders informed automatically through integrations

How do we explain the apparent disconnect between the impact of stakeholder communications and the unchanged effectiveness of major incident management processes? The answer lies not so much in the data as in the correlation.

Are major incident management and stakeholder alignment separate jobs?

The IT professionals in this survey apparently see informing stakeholders as a separate job from the incident management job. That being the case, it can have an impact, but the incident management process can still be very effective. Unfortunately, we did not ask for a quantifiable impact of stakeholder communications during an incident.

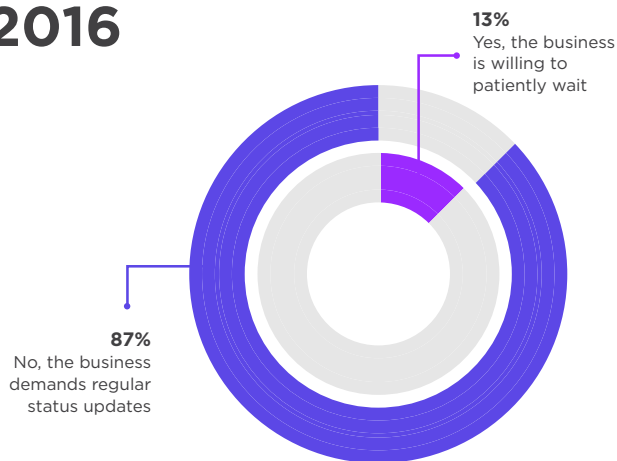
This is actually a surprising development, considering the cultural move toward more integrated business processes and more collaborative groups. This movement started between development and operations teams, but other teams across businesses are applying the same methodologies to improve business across the board.

xMatters encourages integrating tools to enable collaboration. Operationalizing processes as much as possible makes tasks faster and reduces mistakes. Given the unpredictable nature of major incidents, teams need to carefully map out their processes and consider when to automate tasks and when to involve people and curate work.

The Case for Integration-Driven Collaboration

Are business stakeholders and management OK with being kept completely in the dark until a major incident is fully resolved?

2016

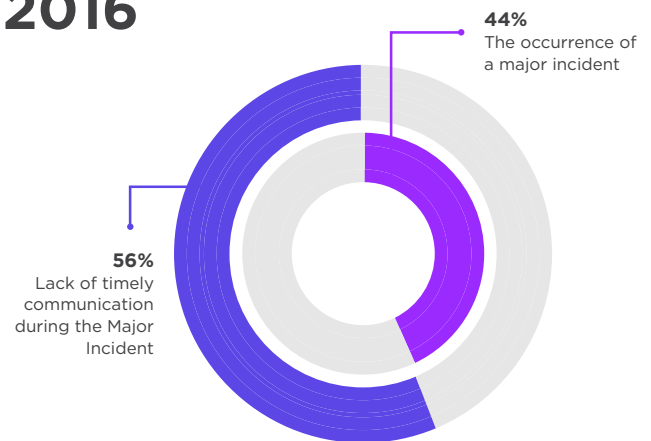


Keeping your stakeholders – including customers and executives – abreast of all pertinent information is a critical part of major incident management. Customized communications deliver the appropriate level of context for each individual's role and authorization level, so executives and engineers are appropriately aware of the impact to their business units, what to expect, and what's expected of them.

In a 2016 xMatters survey of major incident management, executives overwhelmingly insisted on being kept in the loop.

Which of the following is more frustrating to the business stakeholders?

2016



Stakeholders understand that major incidents are inevitable, but they insist on being updated until they are resolved.

When you proactively notify your partners and customers of outages, you also improve customer satisfaction. Customers don't like their business systems being unavailable, and they really don't like not knowing why or when it will be restored.

Not only do automated regular updates help prevent manual communications, they also help reduce costly, time-consuming calls into your call center.

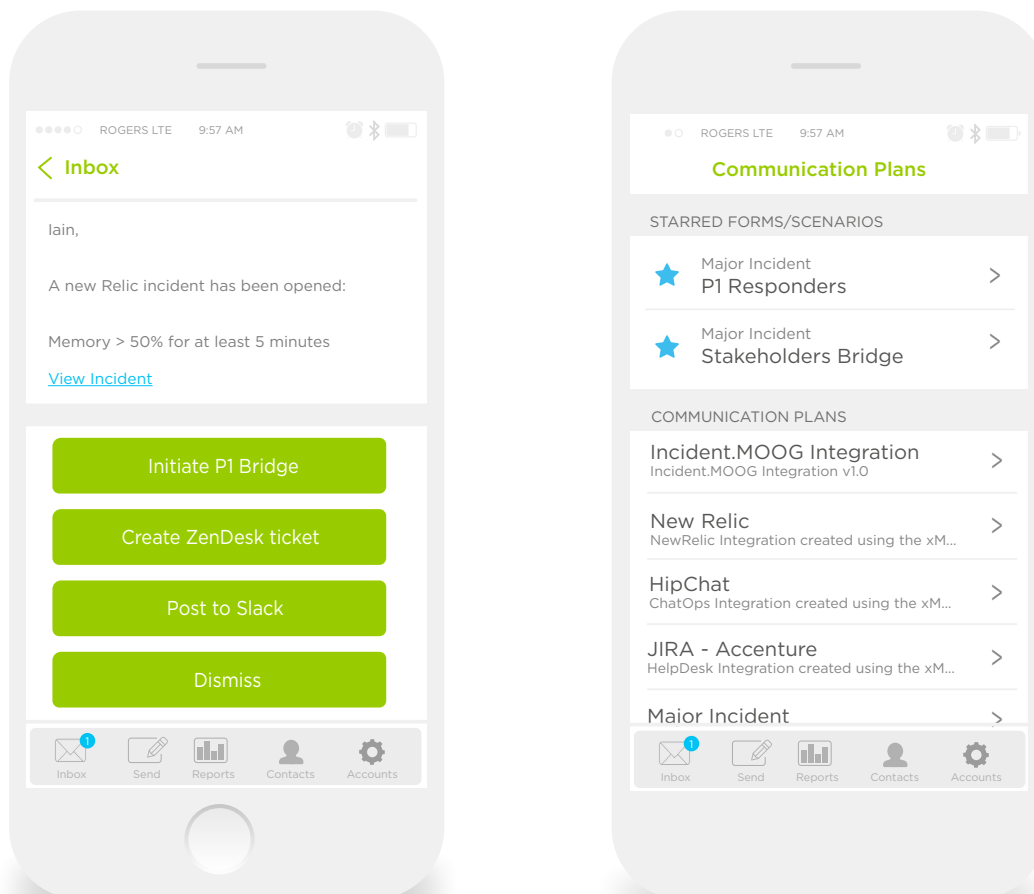
xMatters and Stakeholder Alignment

xMatters takes the manual labor out of stakeholder communications at every step during a major incident. The key is the xMatters Integration Platform, which features more than 200 prebuilt integrations and an unlimited integration builder.

Let's look at how xMatters improves collaboration throughout the incident lifecycle.

Posting updates through compound integrations

Immediately after an incident is reported, incident managers or others can use commands embedded in a service desk ticket to post a status update to StatusPage. This easy update gives your stakeholders self-service access to information.



The xMatters collaboration platform provides integrations directly from notifications even in the mobile app.

Incident managers or technicians working the incident can use slash commands within their ChatOps tools to post status updates to StatusPage as well, to keep stakeholders informed as the incident moves forward. When the incident is resolved and service is restored, the incident manager can post the message to let stakeholders know they can access their systems again.

As teams collaborate, they can post updates to an issue management tool like Jira. They can use integrations involving a service desk tool like ServiceNow or a ChatOps tool like Slack. The ability to perform compound

integration tasks involving multiple third-party systems provides another advantage over manual tasks.

xMatters records each update and saves it in the system of record, usually a service desk, so teams can review the incident and improve for future events.

Among the “hidden” benefits, IT teams become less reactive and more proactive, they improve trust with customers and internal partners, and they reduce costs associated with extra time resolving issues.

Conclusion

Teams may believe that keeping stakeholders informed of progress during a major incident is not part of incident management, but integrating communications into major incident management saves valuable time.

Communication has to take place to satisfy internal stakeholders and keep customers happy, but adding extra steps only complicates the resolution process and pulls people away from their roles as resolution experts.

Use a collaboration tool like xMatters to manage your communications and leverage complete integrations that report back to the originating system.

Teams are getting better at resolving major incidents, but the impact of stakeholder alignment will be a severe limiting factor until teams can automate communications and integrate them into larger processes.

FOOTNOTES:

Sources:

[5 Steps to Build a Process-Centric IT Organization](#), xMatters, 2018

[The Total Economic Impact of xMatters](#), 2017

[Major Incident Management Trends](#), 2016



(x) About us

xMatters is a toolchain communication platform that relays data between systems while engaging the right people to resolve incidents. The platform automates, operationalizes and contextualizes communications within key DevOps processes, fundamentally altering the way business units work together. xMatters also supports enterprises through major incident and change management, alerting the right people on the right channels to time-sensitive events and problems like network outages, supply-chain disruptions, natural disasters and medical emergencies. Founded in 2000, xMatters is headquartered in San Ramon, CA, with additional offices worldwide. For more information, please visit xmatters.com.

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