Pager Rotation Duties

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Purpose of Pager Duties

- To provide a timely response to system issues in order to maintain system reliability at all times.

- Rotating responsibility across multiple individuals allows responsibility to be shared which not only promotes fairness but can help prevent burnout to ensure that whoever is on call responds quickly.
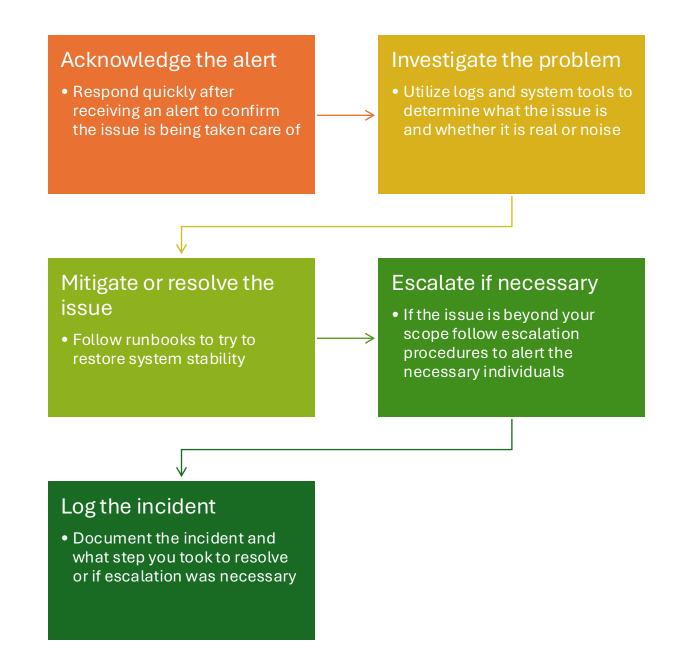
On Call Scheduling

- Large teams with locations across the globe can utilize the follow the sun model. This shifts responsibility from one office to the next based on the time zone the office is in. It allows for 24 hour coverage while only requiring each team to work during their normal business hours.

- Teams that operate in a single time zone can utilize tools to help schedule rotations while accounting for weekends, holidays and time off.

Define Responsibilities

- Define the steps an engineer should take while on call such as:
  - Remaining Available
  - Acknowledging Alerts
  - Trying to resolve issues as quickly as possible
  - Escalating issues when necessary
  - Documenting the incident and their actions
  - Providing Handoff notes for the next engineer

Responding to an Incident

Acknowledge the alert
- Respond quickly after receiving an alert to confirm the issue is being taken care of

Investigate the problem
- Utilize logs and system tools to determine what the issue is and whether it is real or noise

Mitigate or resolve the issue
- Follow runbooks to try to restore system stability

Escalate if necessary
- If the issue is beyond your scope follow escalation procedures to alert the necessary individuals

Log the incident
- Document the incident and what step you took to resolve or if escalation was necessary

Training & Runbooks

It is important to ensure the individual on call has the necessary knowledge and skills to handle the most common issues.

Provide tools to help the team respond to any issues such as a Runbook.

Runbooks provide the how to steps to respond to incidents. They act as a step-by-step guide for common tasks

Regular Review Meetings

Provide a summary of events during latest cycle

Review any major incidents

Review alerts to identify trends and determine the amount of noise

Review Escalation process. Was it used properly? Ensure that escalations are not delayed when they are necessary

Review changes implemented from last meeting

Allow for discussion to make improvements during the next cycle

Optimize Scheduling

To provide fairness it is important sometimes adjust scheduling to equally share the burden. It is not just about equal time on call but about the number of incidents responded to.

In the review meetings you can determine who if anyone has had unequal responsibilities and try and reduce their on call time during the next period to provide more of a break and try and prevent burnout.

Tools

- Modern tools such as PagerDuty and Opsgenie can automatically alert the on-call engineer when an incident occurs

- Ensure that someone acknowledges an alert

- Help engineers with escalations if necessary

- Help create schedules that account for things like vacation to ensure appropriate coverage while logging the number of incidents responded to by each engineer

Summary

ON-CALL ENGINEERS ENSURE 24/7 RELIABILITY BY RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

DUTIES INCLUDE ACKNOWLEDGING ALERTS, RESOLVING ISSUES, AND DOCUMENTING OUTCOMES

TOOLS LIKE PAGERDUTY, GRAFANA, AND RUNBOOKS SUPPORT EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

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