

Best Practices for Rolling Out ITIL

Advance planning and a gradual approach are keys to implementing the Information Technology Infrastructure Library successfully. By Tom Farre

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>> Introduction

The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) is the de facto global standard for IT services management. ITIL provides comprehensive technical documentation and best practices for planning, provisioning, and supporting IT processes and services that add value to business functions.

Enterprise IT executives put a high value on such best practice frameworks, as recent research from IDG Research Services shows: When asked to rate techniques for building an effective information management strategy, survey respondents gave "adoption of standardized IT management disciplines such as ITIL" a 3.64 rating on a 1-5 scale in which "5" meant "extremely effective." Yet when asked to assess their actual performance in this area on the same scale, respondents gave their companies only a 2.94 rating. Clearly there is a gap between the value that businesses attach to ITIL and their success in using it.

This white paper attempts to help organizations close that gap by exploring key challenges in implementing ITIL's comprehensive vision for IT services management. It also provides practical, how-to guidelines for gaining business value from ITIL's proven best practices.

Understanding ITIL

ITIL is the most widely accepted approach to IT service management in the world. Developed by the British government in the 1980s, ITIL consists of a series of books that lay out a framework of best practices for providing reliable, consistent, and cost-effective IT services. According to Enterprise Management Associates Inc. (EMA), an IT research and management consultancy, more than 60 percent of businesses that have adopted best practices have implemented ITIL.

ITIL's best practices are descriptive, not prescriptive, meaning that they offer information on processes and organizational structures that have proven effective, rather than guidance on how to apply them. ITIL's authors assume that implementation specifics will depend on factors unique to each enterprise. Businesses need not adopt ITIL in its entirety, and there is no single, correct sequence in which to adopt its guidelines. Rather, organizations should approach ITIL as they would any reference library, applying its guidance selectively to their most pressing challenges.

In keeping with their commitment to continual improvement, the organizations that maintain ITIL released version 3 (V3) in May 2007. Unlike version 2 (V2), V3 doesn't emphasize IT process and management domains such as help desk, change management, and configuration management. Instead, it is organized around stages of the IT services management lifecycle, and consists of five books: Service Strategy, Service Design, Service Transition, Service Operation, and Continual Service Improvement (see graphic on page 4). While compatible with the processes described in V2, the new version of ITIL emphasizes the business value of IT services.

>> **After buying into ITIL conceptually, some organizations try to implement it all at once, plunging into a broad initiative that lacks targeted business objectives. This mistake accounts for most ITIL failures.**

Benefits and Challenges of ITIL

Nonproprietary, technology-agnostic, and nontechnical, ITIL's best practices bring the disciplines of business management to IT service management, leading to better business results. The benefits include:

- **Improved IT services through the use of proven processes**
- **Reduced IT service management costs**
- **Improved productivity of IT operational staff**
- **Clarification of IT roles and responsibilities**
- **Easier identification of root causes behind IT breakdowns and outages**
- **Alignment with complementary service management standards**

(see Appendix A: Additional methodologies for IT process management)

Such benefits no doubt contribute greatly to the high regard many IT executives have for ITIL. In practice, however, certain misconceptions and missteps can prevent enterprises from realizing ITIL's full value:

Expecting a quick fix: ITIL can't clean up ineffective and chaotic IT operations overnight. Its guidelines are both broad and deep, and take considerable time to apply.

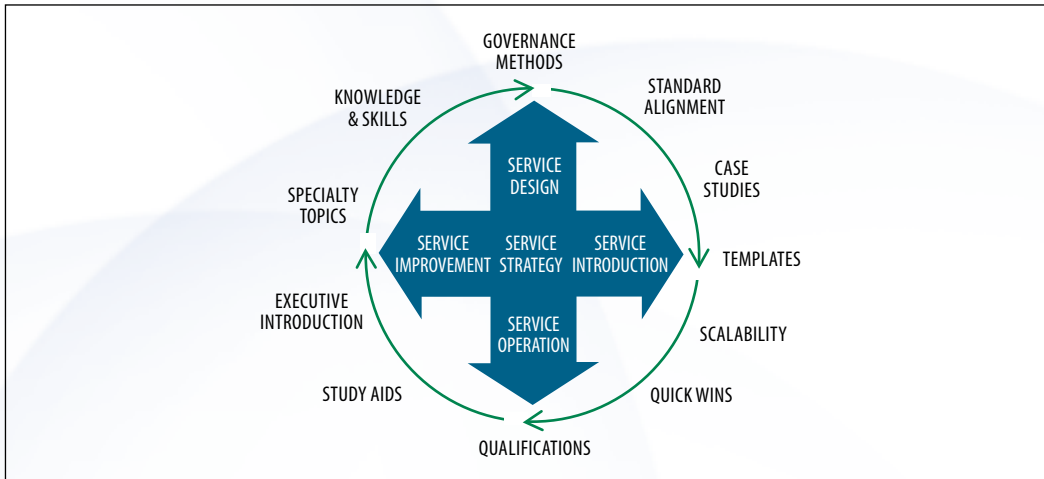
Taking on too much: After buying into ITIL conceptually, some organizations try to implement it all at once, plunging into a broad initiative that lacks targeted business objectives. According to Steve Brasen, IT analyst at EMA and an expert in change and configuration management, this mistake accounts for most ITIL failures.

Underestimating cultural change: By creating an IT organization more focused on serving the business than on protecting technical fiefdoms and cherished responsibilities, ITIL can be highly disruptive to established norms. Underestimating the cultural disturbances ITIL often unleashes is another prime reason why ITIL initiatives fail.

Missing the ITIL vision: Many ITIL projects begin as an attempt to improve basic operational processes such as help desk management. Such efforts often stall, though, when they move on to addressing more complex and interconnected processes such as configuration management and service delivery management.

In fact, failures of this nature, in which organizations view ITIL as little more than a framework for process improvement, are the chief motivation behind V3's refreshed vision, according to George Spalding, co-author of V3's Continual Service Improvement book and vice president at Pink Elephant, a provider of ITIL consulting, training, and events. That vision frames the IT department as one of several organizations (along with the finance and marketing departments, among others) providing services that contribute to business success. In IT's case, those services happen to involve technology. ITIL V3, then, is a

Gaining Traction in Service Excellence



ITIL version 3 divides the IT services lifecycle into five parts, each covered in a different book.

framework for defining the IT department as a service organization rather than a technology organization.

The implications of that shift are profound: Instead of being chiefly responsible for keeping applications patched, servers tuned, and the network available, IT becomes an internal provider of business services such as point of sale, accounts receivable, and online ordering. Of course, many technology components, systems, and processes contribute to those business services, and V3 discusses them just as V2 did. But framing IT processes around business services squarely connects IT to business value. According to V3 co-author Spalding, all five books in ITIL V3 emphasize ways in which companies should design and operate IT organizations and processes to most effectively support the business.

Best Practices for ITIL Initiatives

What, then, should IT organizations do to get maximum value from ITIL? The following guidelines have proven valuable to many companies; they can be applied to first-time ITIL programs as well as to ongoing efforts that have stalled.

Rate process maturity: Though your company's IT pain points may be obvious, it's best to begin an ITIL implementation by formally benchmarking the effectiveness of your IT processes. ITIL recommends basing this analysis on the Capability Maturity Model, a 1-5 scale for measuring an organization's capacity to use its software technologies effectively. After you have completed your benchmarking, you can apply ITIL to those processes most in need of help. You can then use any improvements you achieve to justify future process improvements.

>> **At a minimum, your ITIL program manager should be ITIL-certified, and others in the IT department should have training in job-specific aspects of ITIL.**

Create a project roadmap: Every ITIL program is implemented through a series of subprojects. It's best to scope out a broad plan for the first few ITIL subprojects you intend to perform, specifying the amount of time, resources, budget, and sustained effort they will require. This will help ensure that your ITIL program is both sensibly scaled and focused, so you don't bite off too much at the start.

When devising your project roadmap, keep in mind that ITIL processes contain many interdependencies. This may necessitate working on different processes in parallel.

Write a SIP: To help ensure that an ITIL subproject proceeds smoothly, start by developing a service improvement plan (SIP) spelling out the steps you must complete during the initiation, planning, execution, and closure phases.

According to EMA:

- Initiation focuses on the why and what of the project, setting expectations and establishing the project's scope.
- Planning is where you detail the activities you'll execute and estimate the resources you'll require.
- Execution is the period during which you carry out your plan.
- Closure is where the project receives formal acceptance and validation.

Consider software tools: ITIL software can assist in tasks such as creating a configuration database, monitoring the IT environment for change management purposes, and tracking compliance with your SIPs. Systems management software from BMC, HP, IBM, Microsoft, and others is compatible with ITIL, and many specialized tools and appliances are available from a variety of software firms.

Develop ITIL expertise: Although ITIL is a library anyone can study informally, most projects benefit from a higher level of proficiency. A plethora of professional ITIL consultants are available, but cultivating in-house expertise can be more cost-effective. Many organizations provide ITIL training and certifications. At a minimum, your ITIL program manager should be ITIL-certified, and others in the IT department should have training in job-specific aspects of ITIL. (For information on ITIL training and certification, see Appendix B: ITIL resources.)

Gain management commitment: An ITIL implementation program requires a significant allocation of resources, and can also generate considerable cultural resistance. To achieve success, then, ITIL initiatives need frequent and public endorsements from your company's top executives. In particular, your CIO must strongly support ITIL's vision and back it up with the full weight of his or her office.

>> **By following the best practices in this white paper, any organization can implement ITIL successfully, and at a pace suited to their needs and capabilities.**

For Visionaries Only

The above guidelines describe a “bottom-up” approach to ITIL in which you pinpoint your weakest IT operational processes and use ITIL to improve them through a series of subprojects. Then you can use resources freed up by the success of those first efforts to slowly implement ITIL V3’s master vision of IT as a provider of business services.

More visionary CIOs, however, may prefer a “top-down” approach to implementing ITIL that focuses on business services, rather than operational processes, right from the start. Such an approach typically begins with a business impact analysis aimed at measuring and prioritizing business services and processes such as online ordering, invoicing, order fulfillment, payroll, etc. IT staff can then rate IT services, processes, systems, and components in terms of their contribution to high-priority business services. From an ITIL perspective, such ratings would be essential to setting priorities for process improvement, as well as for establishing service-level agreements for business-critical IT services, processes, and systems.

Conclusion

ITIL’s mature and comprehensive approach to IT service delivery has helped many enterprises enhance IT processes that support critical business functions. Moreover, by following the best practices in this white paper, any organization can implement ITIL successfully, and at a pace suited to their needs and capabilities. Given that fact—and the abundance of ITIL training resources, documentation, and support available—wise organizations not yet using ITIL should begin investigating its potential impact on their IT and business operations promptly.

Appendix A: Additional methodologies for IT process management

ITIL is the most popular framework for IT service management and improvement, in part because of its flexibility. However, it is compatible with and even complementary to other methodologies, including these:

COBIT: The Control Objectives for Information and related Technology is a set of best practices for aligning business and financial goals with IT infrastructure policies, procedures, and processes. ITIL can be coupled with COBIT to accelerate compliance with government regulations, such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act.

ISO 20000: An international standard for IT service management, ISO 20000 was originally designed to reflect best practices contained within ITIL, although it supports other approaches as well. Working toward ISO 20000 certification is a good way to test the effectiveness of an ITIL implementation.

Six Sigma: A process improvement methodology applicable to any type of business function or process, Six Sigma integrates with ITIL by defining, measuring, and analyzing the root causes of IT service management defects. It also offers guidelines for controlling process improvement.

Appendix B: ITIL resources

The Official ITIL Web site: www.itil-officialsite.com

The ITIL Open Guide: www.itlibrary.org

ITIL & ITSM World: www.itil-itsm-world.com

ITIL.org Web site (English language edition): www.itil.org/en

The ITIL Open Encyclopedia: www.itil.technorealism.org