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ITIL: What It Is and Why You Should Care

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Introduction

Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) has been around for 20 years, but interest within the United States has only increased in the last five years. ITIL is becoming the next big thing in Information Technology. It is the new industry buzz-word, the new certification, the new conference, and the new idea that the IT world feels it needs. This paper will describe the origin of ITIL, who controls the ITIL contents, who are the biggest users of ITIL, and why you should care about it. Throughout this paper, it will be important for you to remember that ITIL describes a framework of processes for the management of IT. Because it is a framework, ITIL does not describe in great detail how any particular process should be implemented.

Where did ITIL come from?

ITIL started in the late 1980s when the British Central Computer and Telecommunication Agency (CCTA), now called the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), made a decision that there should be a better way for Information Technology to function. The CCTA commissioned a study group to develop a new approach to managing Information Technology. From this group came Version 1 of ITIL, which was called GITIM, Government Information Technology Infrastructure Management. Version 1 of ITIL was a great deal different from the present-day version. Part of this difference is due to the gradual maturing of ITIL and changes in the Information Technology industry.

Between the development of Version 1 and the year 2001, the number of documents (books) used within ITIL grew to more than 32. In the year 2000, Microsoft used ITIL as the basis for development of their proprietary Microsoft Operations Framework (MOF). The year 2000 also saw the CCTA merge into the Office of Government Commerce (OGC).

Version 2 of ITIL was released in 2001. The present day version contains just 8 books:

- Service Support
- Service Delivery
- Business Perspective
- ICT Infrastructure Management
- Applications Management
- Security Management
- Planning and Implementation
- Software Asset Management

Two of these books, Service Support and Service Delivery, are the heart of ITIL and the focus of the present drive for ITIL adoption.

Because ITIL had its start in the British government, ITIL adoption began there; It then quickly spread to non-government organizations within Britain. From Britain, ITIL moved to Europe and Canada, where it has seen heavy adoption. From Canada, ITIL finally made its way to the United States. The adoption of ITIL, by both government and non-government organizations within the US, is gaining momentum. ITIL truly is the next big thing. If ITIL is new to you, then now is the time to learn more.

Who are the players in ITIL?

The following is a list of organizations and companies that have successfully implemented ITIL. (A list of organizations that have implemented ITIL is several sections down. The groups listed in this section are the ones that control ITIL.)

Office of Government Commerce (OGC)

The Office of Government Commerce, whose web site can be located at <http://www.ogc.gov.uk/>, is the owner of ITIL. The mission of the OGC is to work with the public sector as a catalyst to achieve greater efficiency, increase value in commercial activities, and improved success in the delivery of programs and projects. When you look at the OGC, you will see that the scope of their concern for standards is much broader than just the improvement of IT, extending to other diverse areas (even including plumbing standards).

The Stationary Office (TSO)

The Stationary Office (<http://www.tso.co.uk>) is the largest publisher by volume in the UK, publishing over 15,000 titles a year and providing a comprehensive range of document and publishing services. TSO is the official publisher of the ITIL documentation. The downloadable PDF versions of the old ITIL books can be obtained through TSO's website.

EXIN and ISEB

Within ITIL there are a number of certifications for individuals. The owner of the certification and the certification testing is the Dutch foundation Exameninstituut voor Informatica (EXIN) (www.exin-exams.com) and Britain's Information Systems Examination Board (ISEB) (www.iseb.org.uk). EXIN and ISEB jointly developed the professional certification system for ITIL. This was done in close cooperation with the OGC and Information Technology System Management Forum (itSMF described below). There are three recognized individual certifications: Foundation Certificate in IT Service Management, Practitioner Certificate in IT Service Management, and Manager Certificate in IT Service Management. In addition to certification of individuals working in the industry, there is an organizational certification, BS15000, which is the world's first standard for IT service management. This standard specifies a set of inter-related management processes and is based heavily upon the ITIL framework. BS15000 consists of two parts: BS15000-1 consists of 10 sections:

- Scope
- Terms and Definitions
- Requirements for a Management System
- Planning and Implementing Service Management
- Planning and Implementing New or Changed Services
- Service Delivery Process
- Relationship Processes
- Resolution Processes
- Control Processes
- Release Process

BS15000-2 provides assistance to organizations that are to be audited against BS15000-1 or are planning service improvements.

The Information Technology System Management Forum (itSMF)

ItSMF (www.itsmf.net) is an industry consortium dedicated to managing the cost and quality of IT service management. Members include IT organizations and software and services companies augmented by advisory and review boards of industry leaders, analysts, and customers. Collectively, itSMF USA represents those with a stake in IT service management. The itSMF is involved in two areas. First, the organization provides a forum to address technical and business issues that will enhance the benefits of IT management applications and services. Second, it educates the market about IT service management and its value—in effect, marketing IT service management. Note that www.itsmf.com will take you to the international itSMF web site.

Loyalist College

Loyalist College (www.itilexams.com) is a Canadian college that administers the certification test for individuals for the Americas.

Companies that have implemented ITIL

Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, and IBM have used ITIL as a base for their own proprietary IT management framework and created the following tools.

- Microsoft offers Microsoft Operations Framework (MOF)
- HP offers IT Service Management Reference Model
- IBM offers IT Process Model

Many of the chapters within the ITIL's eight books were written by individuals from one of these companies.

What makes ITIL different?

Over the years many of you have probably been involved in projects related to the improvement of Information Technology such as:

Quality Enablers

- Project Management (<http://www.pmi.org/>)
- Balanced Scorecards (<http://www.balancedscorecard.org/>)
- Six Sigma (<http://www.isixsigma.com/library/content/c010204a.asp>)

Quality Methodologies

- ISO-9000 (<http://www.iso.org/>)
- TQM / Deming (<http://www.deming.org/>)
- Capability Maturity Model (www.sei.cmu.edu/) (<http://www.itservicecmm.org/>)

All of these programs provide methodologies that can be used to improve the processes that you have in place. However, these methodologies provide little or no guidance about which processes are required for IT to function well. ITIL provides a guide to the framework of processes required to run IT as a Business - for the Business and the relationship between those processes. ITIL states that you need to have one function/department and ten processes. For example:

The Service Desk (function)

- Incident Management
- Problem Management
- Change Management
- Release Management
- Configuration Management
- Service Level Management
- Financial Management
- IT Continuity Management
- Availability Management
- Capacity Management

Service Support, the blue book, covers the one function and the first five processes. Service Delivery, the red book, covers the last five processes.

It is possible to adopt ITIL while still using any of the process improvement methodologies listed above. It is not a case of using one or the other.

What is the expected ROI?

Implementation of ITIL can be costly, so where can an organization expect to recover those costs? Here is a partial list the benefits:

- ITIL has become the de facto best practice for running IT. The wide spread adoption of ITIL within an industry will provide guides to what works and what doesn't.
- ITIL brings with it a common dictionary, an item that has been lacking in the present IT world.
- Improved financial management of IT and a better matching of the services of IT to the needs of the overall organization.
- Improved relationship between IT and the organization for which it provide services.
- Improved utilization of the IT infrastructure.
- Improved utilization of IT personnel.
- Improved reputation of IT within the organization that IT services.

Who are some of the organizations that are adopting ITIL?

The adoption of ITIL is gaining momentum within the US. This is evident in the fact that as more of the IT tools have added the tag line "ITIL compliant" into their advertisements. Here is a short list of state, federal and private organizations that are implementing the ITIL framework.

- Microsoft—by providing Microsoft Operations Framework (MOF)
- HP—by providing IT Service Management Reference Model
- IBM—by providing IT Process Model
- US Army
- State of California
- State of North Carolina
- Blue Cross – Blue Shield of Florida
- Blue Cross – Blue Shield of Texas
- LG&E Energy LLC
- United Health Group in Minneapolis

Microsoft, HP and IBM each have their own version of ITIL—which is focused on their own hardware and software—but each is based on ITIL Version 2. Each of these organizations are somewhere on the path of ITIL adoption. Most people with a lot of ITIL experience state that adoption of ITIL has no end point, only a starting point and milestones along the way to measure your level of continuing success.

What are some of the difficulties of ITIL implementation?

The adoption of ITIL may not be easy or short or cheap.

One reason is that IT has not often run itself like a business. IT has a habit of operating as an indispensable group that can use resources and provide services as it sees fit. How many times have you heard the phrase, “we know what our customer needs and that is what we are providing”?

IT has not been in the practice of running itself based on documented needs of the business. One place where this is clearly evident is that many organizations lack a strong change management process. In these organizations, system changes frequently have an adverse effect on the productivity of the entire organization.

The ITIL framework is about process, not organization. Most IT organizations have spent years dividing up IT resources into towers of responsibility, hardware, software, and staff. Breaking down or redefining these towers to expedite the processes within the ITIL framework and making sure that the necessary information is passed between processes may be the biggest and most difficult challenge. Because this is such a large stumbling block, it should be understood that the requirement for ITIL adoption must come from the very top of the IT organization.

The implementation of ITIL cannot be accomplished in six months. But most IT projects are expected to show major positive results or even be completed within six months. ITIL will not meet either of those milestones. ITIL milestones are measured in years rather than months.

Implementing ITIL may also require new resources. Your present technology may not be able to support the processes or inter-process communication required by ITIL. Even though the ITIL framework is about processes, that framework can only work efficiently when you have the right tools to support both the processes and the inter-process data exchange.

Another difficulty is determining where to start. Two questions often asked are:

- Do we try to do everything at once?
- It is such a major undertaking, where do we start?

The answer to the first question is “no.” Trying to do everything at once is too difficult and will only increase the chance of failure. The answer to the second question depends on each individual organization. ITIL provides flexibility in approach, not requiring a specific methodology. Common advice is to look at your present processes and see which of those processes comes the closest to matching the processes describe in either the Service Support or the Service Delivery books. Begin with those processes. Try to pick one that will show a positive result quickly, so others will stay on board.

The ITIL framework will cause a major change in the way your business is being done. Changes in the business processes are always difficult.

Even though ITIL implementation can be difficult, the true value is the long-term adoption of best practices that have shown a positive return on investment. ITIL builds a stronger organization that matches the service provided to the present and future needs of the business and provides that service in a cost-effective manner. Both of these actions will improve the standing of IT within the business and improve both the competitive advantage and bottom line of the business.

What are the steps to getting started?

For most organizations, education or training is the first step. ITIL brings with it a common dictionary of IT terminology. Many companies begin by requiring most or all of their IT staff to take an ITIL Foundations Certification class. This class can be 2 – 3 days in length. Many companies require that the class include a certification test. This training provides a common understanding of the ITIL framework and a common language for a more accurate discussion during the implementation.

A second step is to designate someone as manager of the ITIL adoption project. The adoption of ITIL rises to the level of a major project that requires formal oversight. The project manager should be an ITIL Certified Service Manager or have at least one advisor who is so certified. This is a long-term project and every effort should be made to have the same Certified Service Manager to provide continuity to the ITIL implementation.

A third step is more training. As progress is made toward the implementation of each of the 10 ITIL processes, the manager of each process may be assigned to take a special ITIL Practitioner Certificate class that covers the process for which they have responsibility.

An ongoing step is to consider the need for new technology. However, new technology should not be considered until your processes are better defined. It is important to remember that technology is only an enabler and does not improve weak processes.

Summary

ITIL is becoming the industry standard for best practices for the management of IT. If you are an IT company or an IT division within a company then you can expect to hear, “Where are you in your ITIL implementation?” If you work in the IT industry, and you work for a medium-to-large organization or plan to in your future, then you should think about adding one or more ITIL certifications to your resume—because ITIL will be in your future.

For those of you who are about to begin the ITIL implementation journey, remember to think and talk about the long term, because this journey is measured in years not in months. ITIL is a new approach to continuous improvement. Part of ITIL is the constant improvement of each of the 10 ITIL processes and the inter-process communication. This constant improvement has as its goal to provide IT services in a more cost-effective manner and to better match those services to the present and future needs of the business.

ITIL is a framework of how to manage IT like a business for the business. As such, the ITIL framework does not describe in absolute terms how any of the ITIL processes should be implemented. Those details are left up to the implementer. The goals and key performance indicators for each of the processes is well defined, so that there is a clearly defined road map to measure your success.

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About the Author

Dr. Eugene Ball has 26 years of experience in the customer service industry. This experience followed 12 years of teaching and research in mathematics, computer science, and statistics at universities both in the US and abroad. During the last 26 years, he has held positions related to the customer service industry that ranged from providing direct telephone support to managing a large help desk. Dr. Ball founded Help Desk Solutions, Inc. in 1993. Working through Help Desk Solutions, he has assisted a variety of organizations in implementing or improving their customer service by improving processes and procedures and selecting, implementing, and integrating tools that support and automate these processes. These organizations have included start-up companies, county governments, higher education, and members of the Fortune 500. Dr. Ball is a regular speaker on both national and local levels on topics related to customer support. He has also published a variety of articles on subjects related to the customer service industry. Dr. Ball is one of the founders and has served as President of the North Carolina, Research Triangle, and Central Virginia local chapters of the Help Desk Institute. In 1998, and from 2002 – 2005, Dr. Ball served on the Help Desk Institute Team Excellence evaluation panel. He is a founding member of the Help Desk Institute Individual Certification Standards Committee. He is a certified HDI training partner, a certified HDI Site Auditor, and an ITIL Certified Service Manager. In addition to teaching Help Desk Institute certification, he trains and consults with clients on ITIL issues.