

BUT WHAT DOES IT DO?

What does ITIL[®] mean to different people in the organisation?

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When I ask people whether they use the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), there seems to be a polarized view – some love it, think it's saved them from unnecessary pain, and support it; some run a mile, telling tales of fear, uncertainty and misery. How can a collection of things that seem to be such a good idea polarize users to that extent? I think it's all about the implementation.

ITIL claims to be the most widely accepted approach to IT Service Management in the world, and has risen above other standards like ASPL and COBIT because of its non-proprietary, comprehensive and process driven approach. The financial industry was an early adopter; it started in Europe and is now conquering the world.

ITIL focuses on four main objectives:

- An increase in the customer focus of IT organisations
- An increase in the quality of the IT services
- Reduction in overall IT Service Costs
- Improvement in process thinking in the IT organisation

It does this through the definition of a common service management language and standardized processes. Here's the rub: ITIL doesn't say 'how' to implement ITIL, and I think that's the root cause of the differing opinions.

ITIL divides the support organization into two big sections – Service Support and Service Delivery, and a bunch of sub-functions and an irreverent summary of them could be:

	Service Support	Service Delivery
Major influence through Rational Processes	Incident Management	Service Level Management
Some influence through Rational Processes	Problem Management	Financial Management
	Change Management	Availability Management
Isolated influence through Rational Processes	Release Management	Capacity Management
	Configuration Management	Continuity Management
	Service Desk (function)	

Service Support - typically the management functions to keep day to day operations running smoothly – has within it:

- Incident Management – think of them as the paramedics – they get the patient on the stretcher, stand clear <thump> - all working again, service restored, hurrah, chuck the patient to the Problem Managers and be done with it. With a focus of service recovery they are not bogged down by the need to find root cause. Mostly likely to be heard saying ‘Just reboot it’.
- Problem Management – the forensic department whose goal is to find out what went wrong, make it all better and stop it from happening again. Problem Management can get to dislike Incident Management as Incident Management can trample all over and contaminate the scene of crime. Likely to say ‘We could tell what happened if they hadn’t rebooted it’.
- Change Management – the troublemakers. Without change managers changing things we know most of the problems the Incident Managers have to recover and the Problem Managers have to investigate would not have happened. Everyone dislikes the Change Managers unless they are Very Good. Likely to say ‘Calm Down Dear... It’ll be OK, I had it tested’.
- Release Management – if the Change Managers are disliked, the Release Managers are several times worse – they get to change lots of things at the same time in large bundles. Need to replace every laptop in your organization to run Vista? Bring in the Release Managers. ‘Trust me, I’m a Release Manager’.

- Configuration Management – every organization needs trainspotters and these are they – happy when everything has an asset tag, and never happier than when tending their Configuration Items in their Configuration Management DataBase. A piece of software has a new security bug? You can ask the CMDB for a list of everywhere that it's running that piece of software, and then pass the list to the Change Managers to fix.
- Service Desk – the acceptable face of the IT department – people you phone and mail when it's all gone horribly wrong. Their job is to ignore and frustrate you unless you are Very Persuasive. Buying them chocolate can often help.

On the other hand, sitting in shiny offices with dark shades on in a darkened room are the Service Delivery staff:

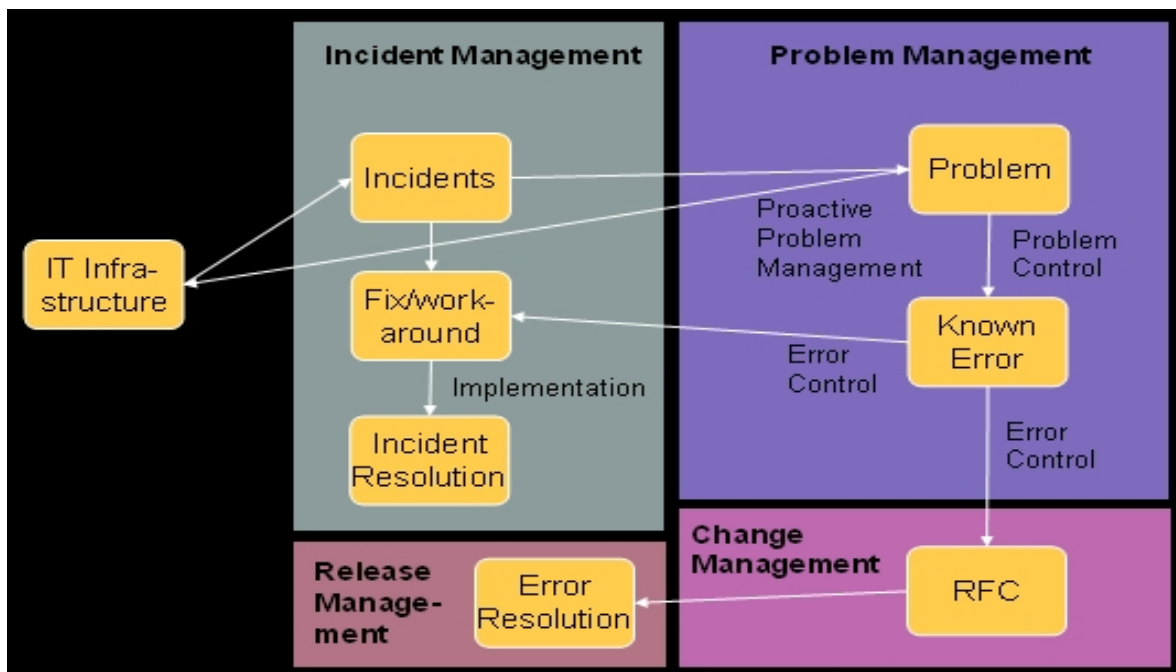
- Service Level Management – the lawyers of the IT department – if you want a agreed recovery time for your service you speak to them – they'll draft Service Level Agreements and Operational Level Agreements, negotiate underpinning contracts with suppliers and maintain and improve IT business service quality. Or they'll make a pig fat by weighing it. 'You want *how much* uptime!'
- Financial Management – You want another server, another building, to write off deprecated equipment, a calculation of Net Book Value, and an understanding of absorbed and unabsorbed costs – they are your pals in integer mathematics. 'How many beans would you like to make five?'
- Availability Management – your friends in floating point mathematics – statistics, graphs, charts, Service Outage Analysis, Fault Tree analysis, Component Failure Impact Analysis, they are there to spot trends to save you from sleepwalking into unavailability through predictable failures. 'I'm telling you, that thing needs replacing, now...'
- Capacity Management – crystal ball specialists to save you from sleepwalking into unavailability through bad sizing. How much is your data/network/processing growing each month – when will it all come crumbling around you? Someone in IT needs to know the company business strategy and plan accordingly. 'You want it to do *what?*'
- Continuity Management – wizards and warlocks - when badness occurs how do you get your production up and running again? They have cunning plans and clever tricks, and regular tests to maximize the chances of your business continuing even if a Very Bad thing has affected your IT department. 'We're testing our business continuity, please report for work at *this* bunker tomorrow...'

IMPLEMENTING ITIL

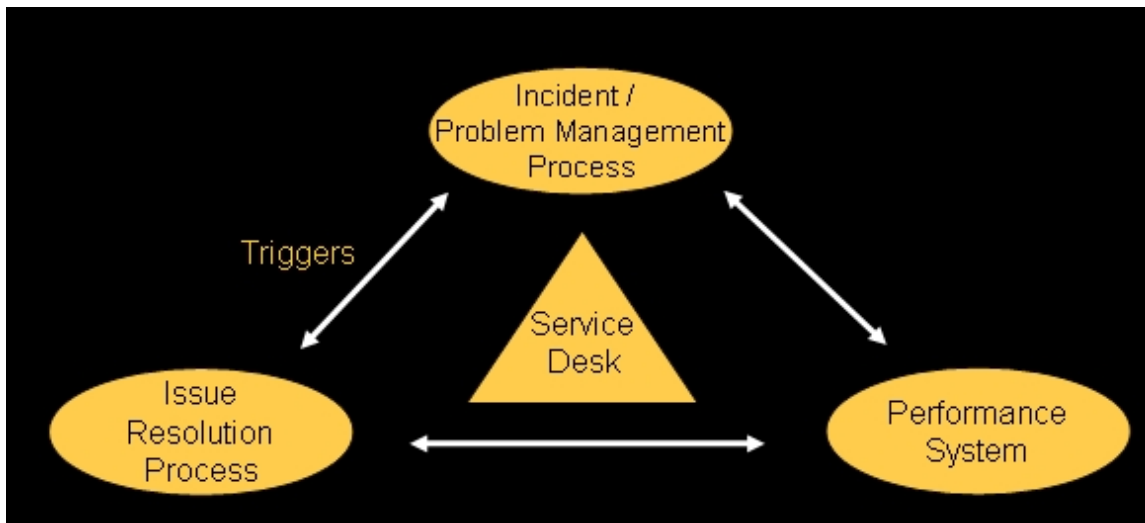
The way to eat an elephant is, of course, one mouthful at a time (apparently, I have not personally eaten an elephant, but you know what I mean). There is no one way to implement ITIL – it just says ‘you should have this function’, now you, using your vast experience of the IT industry have to go and do it.

There are broadly three ways to implement ITIL;

- One process at a time (could be a job for life followed by the presentation of a carriage clock and retirement to a little cottage in the country)
- Clustered implementation of inter-related processes (for instance Service Desk, Incident Management and Problem Management first, with other management structures following later seems to be a popular strategy)
- All at the same time (a recipe for overwhelming a support organization, or causing elephant induced indigestion and the aforementioned disgruntlement)



IT Service Management of course needs to consider the people aspect of the inner workings of the IT organization – in the long term no-one changes their behavior unless there are considerations for the performance system (this is not the ‘management performance system’, that lovely thing that tips numbers into our bank accounts periodically, defines vacation policies and if we’re lucky showers us with employee discounts, I’m talking about the performance system that we work inside, whether we acknowledge it’s existence or not – it’s the thing that drives us do wrong things even if we know it’s the wrong thing to do - if it’s not implemented properly).



During the implementation the ‘how’ also needs to be worked out. This is both a strength and a weakness – a strength in that you can implement ITIL to suit your own environment, and a weakness in that two ITIL compliant organizations may not easily be able to talk to each other if they’ve implemented ITIL defined functions completely differently.

If there are Problem and Incident Management functions they both need an effective Situation Appraisal and Root Cause Problem Analysis method defined and implemented. ITIL doesn’t say how to do these functions; it just says that you should. ITIL helps intercommunication by defining terms; “incident”, “service request” and “escalation”. By extending ITIL’s defining terms and selecting the same method of Problem Analysis as many other ITIL compliant organizations you can create advantages for yourself and your customers that are bigger than the sum of the parts.

ITIL – HOW IT SUPPORTS THE IT SERVICE INDUSTRY

Given that ITIL was originally forged when British government determined that the level of IT service quality provided to them was not sufficient, and has been developed over a number of iterations, the thinking is proven and refined.

By ITIL keeping vendor neutral, it has given organizations the flexibility to implement ITIL where they see the best benefit for themselves, which in turn starts with a clear set of improvement objectives.

By providing a comprehensive set of best practices and consistent definitions of key IT terminology and processes across the industry, it is being taken up by an increasing number of large support organizations – and the probability of it becoming a global standard increases every day.