

What ITIL® means to modern businesses and project managers today

And how to get started in Service Management

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Abstract

ITIL® has come a long way since its introduction in the 1980s as a set of practices for IT Service Management (ITSM) focused on aligning IT services with the needs of business. It has become so much more than an operational framework for IT service delivery and now offers internationally adopted best practice guidance for any organisation delivering all types of projects and services. In this article, Russell Kenrick, Managing Director at ILX, looks at what ITIL offers to project managers against a backdrop of globalisation and offers some tips on getting started with integrating ITIL best practice into project management.

Introduction

ITIL® has come a long way since its introduction in the early part of the 1980s as a simple set of practices for IT Service Management (ITSM) focused on aligning IT services with the needs of businesses. It has become so much more than an operational framework for IT service delivery and now offers internationally adopted best practice guidance for any organisation delivering all types of projects and services.

ITIL enables global businesses and project managers to deliver better and more efficient services. Traditionally, service management would take over where project management finished and there was a disconnect between the two. When project managers completed their project and threw their ball over the fence, service managers on the other side had no idea what to expect – a beach ball or a bomb. That should no longer be the case. The ITIL framework encompasses the project strategy from the creation of the design of the final services to be delivered through to the transition of those new, altered or even removed services in live delivery.

Since 2007, ITIL, formerly an acronym for Information Technology Infrastructure Library, has been managed by AXELOS, a joint venture between Capita and the UK Cabinet Office. ITIL is no longer just a framework for UK Government, but is being deployed around the world in all sectors from banking to retail, hospitality to manufacturing.

Benefits

AXELOS identifies a number of key benefits for individuals and global organisations arising from being ITIL trained¹. ITIL enables service management staff to get involved with plans for new service delivery and service improvement at a much earlier stage, ensuring a smooth transition at the delivery stage. Project managers retain ultimate control of the initial planning and design stages, but ITIL embeds the need to plan for the delivery stage from the start and integrates a service management point of view throughout the creation and testing stages too. This way, using ITIL, projects deliver the expected service benefits because the focus from the beginning is far more on the service outcomes.

ITIL helps organisations manage the business risk associated with their services and make sure the quality of services matches customer needs and expectations. The ITIL service level management process supports project managers and service managers in working together to define and agree specific and measurable service targets, understand how to best set up monitoring and reporting, and decide on the best corrective action.

Service management best practice supports business change at the speed customers' need, while maintaining a stable environment. The framework allows the change management process to respond to changing requirements in an agile manner while minimising the impact of any disruptions on customers' business processes. Organisations that adopt ITIL best practice will see the benefit when they come to work with other industry sectors, suppliers, partners and customers both locally and worldwide. ITIL is well-established globally and provides a common terminology for issues and faults, for example.

ITIL qualifications are life-long. Project managers who achieve ITIL certification will be in a strong position in the global recruitment market, with doors opening to a variety of job roles that value a service management focus for their project delivery.

Globalisation drives ITIL adoption in US

The ITIL framework has been adopted throughout the world and is well embedded in Europe and Asia Pac regions. High profile users of ITIL include HSBC, NASA and IBM. In the USA, the appetite for ITIL has increased several-fold recently, not surprisingly as ITIL is about continuing delivery of good quality products and services to customers. US organisations are heavily service delivery-centric and arguably have led the field in service delivery worldwide. Perhaps because of this they have not felt the need for a service delivery best practice framework.

However, many large US government departments are now using ITIL, following the service management framework very closely indeed. This factor, coupled with increasing exposure to ITIL in global markets is driving adoption in North America. In an increasingly global marketplace, many large US organisations are becoming multinational and are embracing the common language of ITIL to work on service delivery with global partners.

Barriers

ITIL began life as a framework for IT service delivery, and an outdated perception that ITIL is purely about IT or for IT-focussed organisations can create a barrier to adoption and obscure the benefits of integrating a service management focus with project management. Another common misconception is that ITIL is all about governance. Project managers shy away from introducing a framework that they perceive as inflexible and likely to hinder the agile delivery of projects. In fact ITIL is scalable and flexible and it is perfectly possible to 'cherry pick' the bits of ITIL framework that work for your organisation. ITIL has a mantra – Adapt and Adopt.

ITIL is suitable for any size of organisation. At first glance it may appear designed for larger enterprises and it may look as if your organisation simply does not have enough people to make it work. In fact, people using ITIL can each adopt a number of ITIL roles and combine roles as needed for maximum flexibility.

Some organisations that have had experience of the ITIL framework found that it failed to deliver the expected benefits. In some cases there was a gap between the foundation-level training that most people start with and their ability to put the training into practice in the workplace. AXELOS has recently plugged that gap with a new ITIL Practitioner level of certification. ITIL Foundation introduces all the basic ITIL concepts and terminology, while ITIL Practitioner delivers practical skills to help make a start with adopting and adapting ITIL within the organisation.

All types of projects or programmes may benefit from a service management approach alongside project management. The vast majority of projects have a service-related outcome. Even a construction project is focussed on creating a building that will work for its ultimate inhabitants to use as they need. Anybody in any role that is responsible for running a service, or a business that offers a service component to support its products, could benefit from ITIL.

Getting started

Here are some top tips for getting started with introducing service management into project management practice:

1. **Only read the ITIL guidance that is relevant to your organisation.** There are five books of ITIL guidance – don't attempt to read them all from start to finish. For many project managers, 'ITIL Service Transition'² is the best starting point.
2. **Don't try to consume all in one go.** Start by implementing service management best practice to address the areas that are causing you most concern, such as change management. Many tools and consultants are focussed on a big bang approach to ITIL, but a step-by-step approach is more effective. Find a quick win and then build on that.

3. **Remember that ITIL is a guidance framework – it does not lay down the law.** Adapt and adopt the advice to suit your organisation and do not attempt to follow it all slavishly.
4. **Keep in mind that one person can have multiple roles.** The ITIL framework defines a number of service management roles, but it is not necessary to allocate one role to one person. Conversely, multiple people can carry out different aspects of one ITIL role.
5. **Use customer value metrics to measure service management outcomes.** Service management is about delivering customer value. If it is not possible to tie the project outcome to delivering value to customers, internal or external, don't do it. ITIL is very straightforward when it comes to determining benefits – if you can't measure it, you can't control it. If you can't control it you can't manage it.

ITIL service management best practice has developed well beyond its IT roots. Most large organisations in areas of the world such as EMEA and Asia Pacific have been drawing on service management best practice for the best part of 30 years. Now project managers throughout the world can benefit from the wisdom of ITIL to add a depth of understanding of service management to project delivery and close the gap between completing a project and handing it over for service delivery.

If your organisation has arrived late to the party it is still not too late to join in. U.S. organisations, in particular, which have long prioritised service delivery, can now tap into ITIL to formalise their service management best practice and deliver excellent customer service.

References

¹https://www.axelos.com/Corporate/media/Files/Key%20Benefits/ITIL_Value_Proposition.pdf

² <https://www.axelos.com/store/book/itil-service-transition>

Additional insights from Paul Wigzel, ITIL® expert, Paul Wigzel Training and Consultancy

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About the Author



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Russell Kenrick is Managing Director at ILX Group, responsible for the company's training portfolio. ILX is an international learning services provider, specialising in digital learning solutions for Project and Programme Managers. Russell is an experienced general manager with excellent commercial awareness and an established track record in business development, having previously worked for a number of Education/ Technology businesses including Capita, KnowledgePool and Reed Learning. He is passionate about learning technology and the ever increasing role it plays in workplace development. Russell holds bachelor's degree from the University of Portsmouth in Engineering Geology and Geotechnics (BEng).

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