

Getting Started with ITIL

By Mike Tainter, Forsythe

Getting started with ITIL may seem daunting but you may be farther along than you think, writes ITSM Watch columnist Michael Tainter of Forsythe.

More and more IT organizations are beginning to adopt ITIL-based IT service management initiatives, and turnout at national, regional and local events on the subject keeps growing. Yet, one of the main questions on people's minds is, "Where do we start?"

In order to get going, the business and the IT organization must be aligned in pursuit of common goals. An ITIL initiative is a long-term methodology for providing quality services that enable the business to gain a competitive advantage. Executive leadership within IT must embrace the benefits and sell the idea to the business.

Educating the Organization

The first step is to ensure that senior IT leaders develop a solid understanding of the activities that comprise ITIL and of what ITIL adoption accomplishes. Candidates for training should be selected carefully; each person who attends training should be a respected leader with the ability to make things happen.

When people use multiple methods to understand a new concept, they tend to retain the content longer, with a more detailed understanding. Too often, organizations decide to attend training in place of reading the books. It usually works best to start by reading the books that make up the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL).

Attending training after reading the books allows people to ask challenging questions of the instructors so they can apply ITIL in their specific organization. Better understanding tends also to create greater enthusiasm for and dedication to overcoming the challenges ITIL adoption presents.

Next, this core group can begin imparting their ITIL knowledge to others in the organization so all start to "speak the same language." Workshops and education sessions are effective ways to promote excitement (and thus reduce resistance to the changes ITIL adoption requires).

You know you are successful when you start to hear "hallway chatter" about the benefits of ITIL.

Establishing a Steering Committee

A steering committee is necessary to lead the organization through the ITIL adoption. At the core of ITIL are Service Support and Delivery processes that will fundamentally change the way IT delivers its services to their customers.

Assign leaders to take on the role of process owners and challenge each with gaining a detailed understanding of his or her process and its integration with all the other processes. As with any initiative of this scale, sound leadership and guidance is critical to its success. Experience demonstrates that such leadership must be "top-down" versus "bottom-up."

Assessing Process Maturity

The next step is to assess your organization's maturity using the ITIL best-practices as your guide. The Service Support and Service Delivery books contain a list of the activities for each process. Process owners should create a list of these activities to use as a guide to determine how the IT organization is executing against them.

Maturity level is measured through the use of a maturity model; such as 0 = No process in place, 1 = Initial or identified process, 2 = Repeatable, but not documented, 3 = Defined and documented, 4 = Measurable and 5 = Optimized, you can identify and document any gaps that exist in an assessment report.

This report will be your guide in determining your target maturity and the steps you need to take to get there. When you conduct the assessment you will find that you may have more maturity in some activities for each process than in others. For example, most organizations perform well in areas such as Incident or Change Management even before they begin an ITIL initiative.

The results of the assessment must be shared with the members of the steering committee and executive leadership to gain consensus on the current state of the organization's processes. Once consensus is reached and a commitment is made to address the gaps in the report, you can start to build your action plan.

If you obtained services from a vendor for your assessment, ensure this same vendor helps you with your roadmap. The

roadmap should contain a list of projects that you can undertake to increase your process maturity.

The first project in your roadmap should be a strategy and planning effort to create the project plan that provides for the following:

- Creation of a baseline service catalog that defines the services your IT department delivers; ·
- Process workshops to gain a more detailed understanding of the activities for each process; ·
- Assignment of roles and responsibilities for the people that will execute the processes, including a training and communication plan; ·
- Tools and technology that can be used to automate the processes; and ·
- Measurement and reporting to evaluate compliance.

Too often, organizations begin ITIL adoption by focusing on activities for service delivery such as capacity or availability management, because that's where they are experiencing pain. However, the power of ITIL is in its integration.

Organizations adopting ITIL have discovered that maturity of their service support processes creates the groundwork for optimizing their configurations to provide better service. For example, if you consistently detect, log, classify, assign, resolve and close incidents, it can lead to more effective problem management, which helps you identify and control known errors.

Problem Management can then be your entry point to creating your availability and capacity plan to enact changes in your environment to address those known errors.

Starting the Journey

To summarize, your ITIL journey should start with education and leadership, assessment and an actionable roadmap for success. Hearing how other organizations have tackled their ITIL journey can be invaluable to your success because you can learn from their experience. This can be done by joining a local user group such as the IT Service Management Forum USA (itSMF USA) local interest group in your area or continuing to read articles such as those posted on ITSMWatch.com.

But keep in mind, ITIL is not a project, it is a method to change the way your organization delivers its services to the business. A project has a beginning and an end, whereas ITIL does not have an end, it is a continual journey toward process maturity that enables IT to deliver quality services to the business so that it can continue to thrive and be profitable.

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