

## ITIL® - See, I told you!

*“The only true source of knowledge is experience.” - Albert Einstein*

- Are your Help Desk processes aligned to industry best practices?
- Are procedures in place for every aspect of the customers' service experience, from the first report of an incident, to the resolution entry in your knowledge base?
- Are your processes continuously being optimized for efficiency, and are metrics in place to prove it?
- Are your ownership and communication responsibilities clearly defined?
- Are Service Level Agreement (SLA) metrics in place to measure service delivery from your customers' perspective?

**A few years back** I purchased my copy of the ITIL: Best Practice for Service Support (the blue book). A paperback from a popular online bookseller costing \$120! I was thinking this had better be really good! What I found within that book has profoundly clarified my thinking of the Help Desk and IT Service Management.

Within a couple of days after the book had arrived, I had used up a pack of “Post-it” tabs and was on my second yellow highlighter. Looking back, I had highlighted so much of the book that it was hard to tell what was more important. It was because ***the pages of that book were filled with knowledge that could have only been gained through experience.*** With great delight (and my new book in hand) I scheduled meetings with department leaders from: network management, systems management, operations management, applications management, database management, client services and IT security. To kick off each meeting I pointed to the relevant section of the ITIL Service Support book – already highlighted to clarify my point - and said, “See, I told you!”

**But, “Why ITIL and why now?”** Here are four of the many compelling reasons why it's time for a change in the way we manage IT services:

- 1) Information Technology has an ever-increasing responsibility in business success. Never in history has IT played such an important role in the success of business.
- 2) Many IT shops are frequently operating in a reactive – interrupt driven mode. *“Doing things the way we've always done them, yet expecting different results.”* – Deming. Why do you think Help Desk agents dread Monday mornings? It's because they don't get to “taper into the workweek.” Instead, they are slammed with calls from unhappy users who came into work and discovered things are not working as they did the previous Friday.
- 3) Poor change management frequently results in business service interruptions. In fact, new IT heroes are born every day (or should I say in the middle of the night) as they are paged to resolve an urgent outage that resulted from a recent change to an application or infrastructure.

- 4) IT service providers frequently lack business focused metrics to quantify needs of their customers and to confirm that process improvement activities are bringing the desired effects. Each year IT spends most of their annual budget to implement the newest technology – with no significant improvement in client satisfaction or reductions in operating costs.

**So, “What is ITIL?”** Initially developed in the 1980’s by the UK government, ITIL has become the most widely accepted IT Process Management Framework in the world. It is a set of best practices for IT service management. It’s not a “how to” step-by-step methodology, but a framework for how IT services can be optimized to work together.

I particularly appreciate ITIL because it builds upon lessons learned from my days in manufacturing: ISO9000 (process control, Six Sigma continuous improvement, and strong vendor partnerships). Come to think of it, there are many similarities between IT Service Management and manufacturing - we all want a quality product that is priced competitively and performs predictably.

**OK, “How do I implement ITIL where I work?”** I have always said that the Help Desk is the center of the IT universe - perhaps because of my years working as a Help Desk Director for an IT services company. Therefore it comes as no surprise to me that ITIL is a set of books that describes ten key IT processes and one function – the Service Desk. Better get used to this new term; the Help Desk of old is now called the Service Desk. ITIL tells us the Service desk is the single point of contact between the User and IT Service Management, facilitating the restoration of services with minimal business impact, and providing an interface for all of the key IT processes. Be sure to highlight that section in your ITIL book.

I have found that a balanced approach is required to achieve IT service excellence. People, process and technology must all come together to achieve IT business objectives.

- The **people** who make up the service organization are the first place to focus. Have business objectives and service goals been clearly communicated throughout the organization? Are balanced metrics in place to prioritize efforts and measure results? Will accomplishment of these goals address the business needs while providing job satisfaction and personal rewards for staff? Are Root Cause Analysis (RCA) and Six Sigma process improvement teams in place? Organizational assessments, customer surveys, performance metrics and staff training are the place to start. This would be a good time to provide an ITIL Executive overview for the leadership team. Begin by discussing how department silos can benefit from implementing ITIL cross-silo processes.
- The **process** for each IT department should be aligned with the other departments to ensure ownership and eliminate redundancy. The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) is an excellent resource for IT best practice processes. Are your processes aligned to industry best practices? Are procedures in place for every aspect of the service experience, from the first report of an incident to the resolution entry in the knowledge base? Has the process been optimized for efficiency? Are ownership and communication responsibilities clearly defined? Are Service Level Agreement (SLA) metrics in place to drive process improvements from a customer’s perspective?
- The **technology** must be optimized to bring efficiency to the IT organization. Well designed client facing tools, such as web interface and CTI, offer customer self-help 24\*7. Incident management tools, system monitoring tools, configuration management databases, and knowledge management tools each bring automation and new levels of efficiency to the support organization. Have tools been aligned to business drivers? Are “alarm storms” a frequent source of frustration? Have thresholds been aligned to SLAs?

**Implementing ITIL best practices, “How much time will it take?”** Frequently two to three years are required to achieve ITIL level 3 maturity. I recommend soliciting the services of an ITIL “Guide.” An expert who has implemented ITIL before, can bring a tool box of templates and a map to help you avoid the obstacles where others have fallen. Regardless of your situation, the ITIL Progressive Improvement Model below should be followed:

- Where do we want to be? What is our vision and what are our business objectives? Conduct a customer satisfaction survey to identify key services and their satisfaction with those services.
- Where are we now? Conduct an ITIL Process Maturity Assessment to identify needs and opportunities within your organization.
- How do we get to where we want to be? Develop a project plan to address the “pain points” for your business through process improvements and re-engineering. Be sure to identify risk factors and how they will be addressed in your project plan.
- How do we know we have arrived? Develop metrics and measures. Set up a balanced scorecard. Re-assess customer satisfaction with your IT services.

Because business needs, customer needs, and IT technology are continuously changing it is always important to return to the beginning of the ITIL Progressive Improvement Model and ask again, “Where do we want to be?”

**About the author** – Jim Bolton has more than a decade of experience in architecting IT Service Management solutions. His application of ITIL best practices, ISO process disciplines and Six-Sigma quality improvement methodologies bring a balanced approach to elevate service excellence. Having lead re-engineering projects for nearly twenty Help Desks over the past five years, Jim brings extensive experience in Help Desk best practices. As President of Propoint Solutions, Jim and his team of experienced professionals can take the risk out of achieving Service Management Excellence in your organization. [jbolton@propointsolutions.com](mailto:jbolton@propointsolutions.com).