

How to Ensure a Successful ITIL Implementation

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Companies of all sizes and across all industries are embracing IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) in record numbers. By developing process-driven IT organizations, these companies are achieving significant efficiency improvements and cost savings.

"Before we began ITIL, we had a 700 trouble ticket backlog and now we never have more than 40 to handle at any one time," said Fran Findley, a project management analyst for information services at MultiCare Health System in Tacoma, WA. "Now it takes hours rather than weeks to handle an escalated user issue."

Ed Holub, a research director for IT operations management at Gartner states that even though ITIL is a set of integrated, best practices it doesn't mean it is a cookie-cutter program that lays out exactly how things should be done.

"ITIL is high-level and focuses on 'what' should be done, but doesn't describe at a detailed level 'how' to do it," he said. "It is important, therefore, that IT and business executives work together to understand what specific business problems they are trying to resolve, and how ITIL can be an enabler to solving them."

Ron Potter, manager of best practices at TeamQuest Corp. of Clear Lake, Iowa, agrees. He feels that it is vital to gain early consensus on the reasons for implementation.

"Everyone needs to agree on the business benefits for doing ITIL," said Potter. "Some do it purely to improve service, some to reduce costs, some to improve communications between IT and business, the rest some combination of the three."

Buy-in, of course, starts at the top. At MultiCare, the CIO and a line-of-business vice president championed ITIL and provided a budget to upgrade the help desk tracking system and associated processes.

Understanding the Business

Typically, senior executives publish goals for the coming year. The individual business units then determine what actions they need to take to support them.

But how can IT learn what these goals are? Ask, said Fred Broussard, research manager for Enterprise System Management Software at IDC.

A smart IT team can canvass the various business units to understand their short-term and long-term goals, and determine how IT fits in. Once the basic intelligence is mapped, IT management should have a good feel for where the business is at today, where it is going and to determine the best implementation of ITIL around the aggregated goals.

It is common sense to start such an initiative at the top in order to ascertain C-level goals and align projects to ongoing programs to increase revenue and better service. The lower down the chart you go, the more detail is required until all stakeholders have been addressed.

With that basic research completed, though, there is still plenty of work to do. Asking is one thing, but it has to be backed up by solid commitment from those affected.

"A CIO needs to be really careful that they get the commitment to participate on boards, to provide funding, and add manpower," said Broussard. "You can gauge your level of real commitment by how easily executives blow off ITIL-related meetings."

Understanding IT

While IT has to be all over the business side to establish goals and align to existing endeavors, the opposite doesn't necessarily hold true. It just isn't necessary for business

executives to get involved in all the details of how the various ITIL processes are executed, much less how the underlying technology infrastructure functions.

"A core concept in ITIL is to define IT services in terms that the business understands," said Holub "Business executives should keep it simple by working with IT to define what those services are, and be able to negotiate formal service level agreements (SLAs) that correctly sync up expectations of what the business needs with what IT is capable of delivering."

One good way to bring both camps more closer together, suggests Brian Johnson, ITIL practice manager at CA and author of 15 books on ITIL, is to address critical business continuity (BC) issues. His company has aligned software tools for help desk, asset management, change management and BC to ITIL.

"By formulating a proper plan for disaster recovery, IT helps catalyze business involvement and drive a better understanding between the two camps," he said.

Role playing games, too, such as CA's Apollo 13 ITIL simulations, may help organizations drive ITIL awareness by providing real-world scenarios. These enable teams to learn about managing processes more effectively. The end result can be an educational experience that demonstrates the benefits ITIL can offer to both sides of the business.

Like CA, TeamQuest is also aligning its software to the ITIL framework in order to bring IT and business units closer together. TeamQuest View, for example, adds value to ITIL service delivery, capacity management, service support and infrastructure management and ITIL application management.

"Business leaders need to be integral part of an ITIL implementation and participate from the beginning," said TeamQuest's Potter. "They should participate in basic ITIL training in concert with their IT counterparts. For best results, this basic training should be customized to the organization so all can understand how ITIL will fit in day-to-day operations and the benefits it will provide."

Work Ethic

Holub emphasizes that organizations shouldn't underestimate the level of effort required to transform themselves into being more process- and service-centric.

"Fundamentally ITIL is less about technology and is more about changing the culture of an organization to embrace the value inherent in standardization versus one-off solutions," he said. "Always remember that ITIL should be viewed as a means to an end. Don't get fixated on achieving a certain level of process maturity and lose sight of the underlying goals that motivated the journey to begin in the first place."

CA's Johnson agrees and offers a way to create cultural change: Identify ITIL champions in all areas of the business and train them to become evangelists within the business.

"It's also important to ensure that the ITIL plan is not perceived solely as an 'IT' project," he said. "Awareness training early in the project lifecycle helps overcome resistance. People need to understand what's driving the initiative, why change is needed, and how they and the organization will benefit."