

Demystifying ITIL

Recommendations for the SMB Market

WHITE PAPER

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THE CHALLENGE FOR THE SMB MARKET

Recently, there has been a great deal of hype about ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) in the US.

For example, analysts from leading research groups have written white papers about the subject. The acronym has taken center stage at many high traffic IT tradeshows. HDI, the world's largest membership association for internal and external IT Service and Support professionals, offers ITIL training programs for IT professionals. Microsoft operations framework (MOF) frequently references ITIL and its corresponding vernacular. There are even organizations such as the itSMF dedicated to educating a worldwide audience about ITIL.

Yet, despite all the buzz, most IT professionals are still unaware of what ITIL really is and where it came from.

BRIEF HISTORY OF ITIL

Contrary to popular belief, ITIL is not new. ITIL has been around for 20 years. It was originally developed by the Central Computer and Telecommunication Agency (CCTA), now called the Office of Government Commerce (OCG) of the British government, to streamline and improve their IT operations. It was widely accepted and adopted by many companies throughout Europe in the late 80s and 90s, then made its way across Canada in the mid-90s. It has only been in the last 5 years that ITIL has received interest in the US.

Simply put, ITIL is a framework or set of guidelines intended to organize and manage IT operations. It details a host of processes that apply to how IT should be managed. Initially, ITIL definitions and process guidelines were compiled in a set of 14 books, which demonstrates the enormity of the scope involved.

ITIL isn't owned by anyone, but continues to evolve through a coalition of companies focused on improving IT operations, who have consolidated its original 14 volumes into a current set of 8 which include:

- Book 1. Service Support
- Book 2. Service Delivery
- Book 3. Business Perspective
- Book 4. ICT Infrastructure Management
- Book 5. Applications Management
- Book 6. Security Management
- Book 7. Planning & Implementation
- Book 8. Software Asset Management

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DETERMINING IF ITIL IS RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Before introducing the ITIL framework into an organization, practitioners must be aware of what ITIL is and what ITIL is not.

ITIL is not something that is mastered overnight. It is a long term endeavor that takes time, possibly years, and requires commitment from all areas of the organization. There are no shortcuts, and it can be costly.

ITIL is very detailed in approach and implementation. At the heart of ITIL is Service Management, which includes 2 books called Service Support and Service Delivery. These two books alone define 10 basic processes which break out as follows:

Service Support

Configuration Management
 Incident Management
 Problem Management
 Change Management
 Release Management

Service Delivery

Availability Management
 Capacity Management
 Service Continuity Management
 Financial Management
 Service Level Management

These processes are not standards, nor are they intended to be. It is up to each organization to determine how far to go and when “enough is enough.” Businesses who have implemented ITIL successfully have viewed it as a set of guidelines they can customize to:

- Assist in getting a handle on “the big picture”
- Help build order and structure where there may be chaos
- Reference theory as well as practical tips on “what” should be done, not “how” to do so

One of the biggest misconceptions is that software tools or solutions are “certified.” **ITIL does not certify solutions nor products as “ITIL-compliant”**. ITIL-certification is for individuals only, and individual certification is obtained by taking a monitored (proxy) test. Some software companies state that their products are ITIL-certified or ITIL-compliant. Many analysts warn that companies who make these kinds of claims should be crossed off the short list.

When evaluating if ITIL is right for your organization, keep in mind that the use of an application is only as good as the way the individual company understands and puts ITIL to work.

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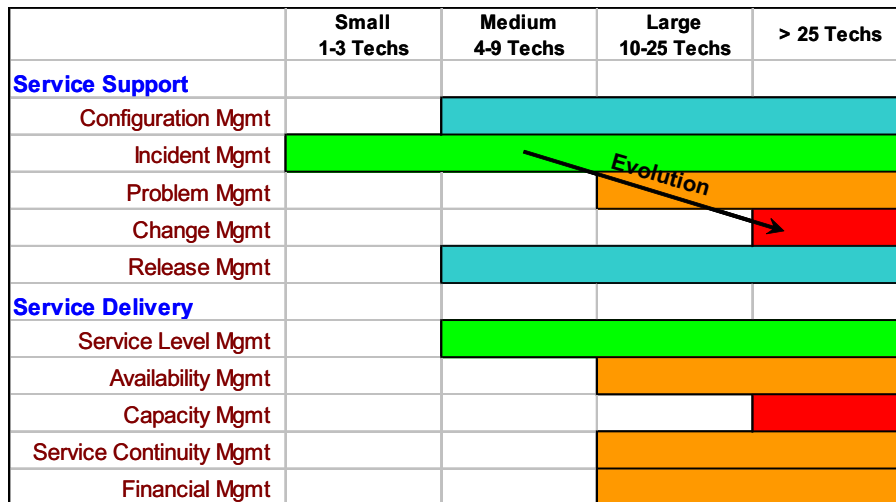
HOW ITIL APPLIES TO THE SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED BUSINESS

It's important to note that ITIL was developed out of a need that existed more so in large companies, such as the UK Government, where it all started. ITIL is more oriented towards (and embraced by) large organizations where process control is a necessity, rather than a luxury.

ITIL is popular with large enterprise companies who support thousands of users, because as IT groups grow in size, there's a natural propensity for internal functions and disciplines to become segregated, and therefore creates a need for more process control to coordinate information flow. Checks and balances are needed and ITIL offers a framework to support that.

However, in a company with only hundreds of PCs, only one person may be responsible for all pertinent disciplines of auditing software, maintaining upgrades and deploying new or updated software to the desktop. As suggested in the diagram below, which indicates which ITIL processes are most applicable based on the size of an organization, this individual may only have time to manage incidents, and little to no time to focus on capacity planning. In smaller organizations, it's sometimes easier to just add equipment to "keep the systems running" which would outweigh planning on the list of priorities, at least in the early stages of business growth. But, the notion of analyzing the impact of implementing a solution still has its merit in any size organization.

	Small 1-3 Techs	Medium 4-9 Techs	Large 10-25 Techs	> 25 Techs
Service Support				
Configuration Mgmt				
Incident Mgmt				
Problem Mgmt				
Change Mgmt				
Release Mgmt				
Service Delivery				
Service Level Mgmt				
Availability Mgmt				
Capacity Mgmt				
Service Continuity Mgmt				
Financial Mgmt				



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HOW ITIL APPLIES TO THE SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED BUSINESS

We promote to SMBs that implementing Service Support capabilities helps facilitate the alignment of IT with business goals through best practices. For example,

- Configuration Management aims to provide reliable, up-to-date information about the IT infrastructure. This information is critical to effectively delivering Incident, Problem and Change Management.
- Incident Management helps restore service as quickly as possible. Since all incidents are captured in a central repository, the knowledge enables the IT organization to be most effective at tapping their various skill sets and greatly assists with cross coverage of issues.
- Problem Management can minimize the impact caused by errors within the IT infrastructure on the business and prevent recurrence of incidents related to these errors. Most SMBs are concerned with the reactive aspect of Problem Management which focuses on solving problems in response to incidents.
- Change Management is a set of processes that ensures that all IT Infrastructure or device changes are implemented in a disciplined way, thus minimizing IT services downtime due to poorly executed changes.
- Release Management helps ensure the quality of the production environment through the use of formal process and procedures when implementing new IT infrastructure components or introducing changes into the IT infrastructure.

Note there is a direct relationship between Incident, Problem and Change Management in that you cannot have Change Management if you do not understand and have not implemented Problem Management. The typical migration for an SMB is first to react to issues (Incident Management), then understand how to proactively prevent issues (Problem Management). Change Management can only come into play when an organization has matured beyond this point.

Where ITIL is concerned, one size does not fit all. Therefore, for the SMB, not all aspects of ITIL need to be “formally” implemented. A good example of this is the “Change Review Board” as recommended in ITIL Best Practices. If all the information regarding change impact and scheduling is contained within a single contributor and not distributed over several internal groups, it simply doesn’t apply.

ITIL does require an investment in resources where head count is required to define, implement, manage and constantly review ITIL to ensure it is being utilized effectively, not counterproductively. Too much process control can be as costly and crippling as not enough. The overarching message is that each SMB needs to find a meaningful balance.

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NUMARA TRACK-IT! AND ITIL

A product cannot make an organization ITIL compliant. There isn't any product available currently that covers all of the ITIL processes. A product can only assist based on how the tool conforms to each organization's pre-defined processes. Products tend to focus on specific areas, therefore, several products may be used to help an organization become more compliant.

For example, The Numara Software family of products, which includes Numara Track-It!, Numara Deploy, Numara Patch Manager, Numara Network Monitor and Numara Services, automates critical IT functions, such as help desk and asset management, software deployment, desktop patch management and network monitoring. The Numara Services team provides consultation and training on ITIL best practices and offers other product-specific knowledge transfers.

Numara Track-It! started in 1991 as a Help Desk and Asset Management tool. Since its inception, more than 45,000 copies have been sold, with 18,000 active customers — the most widely installed in the world. Many customers have been loyal to the product brand for more than a decade, and we continue to improve the offering by soliciting customer input through surveys, our website, focus groups and beta testing.

For more than 15 years, Numara Software has been working with customers that vary from those just beginning to leverage tools in an effort to understand where they are spending resources and time, to those wanting to define, monitor and report on the IT services being delivered to their customers and users.

Many of our strategic personnel hold ITIL certifications including our System Engineers, Product Managers and Professional Services Leaders. This enables Numara Software to partner with our clients in implementing solutions that support their ITIL objectives. This knowledge is also applied as we continue to improve and enhance IT Management solutions from Numara Software.

Numara Software is committed to implementing those elements of Service Support specifically in the areas of Incident, Problem, Change and Configuration Management that best meet the requirements of the small and mid-sized business clients.

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SUMMARY

Businesses examining how ITIL processes may benefit them should bear in mind organizational dynamics, maturity and resources as part of the appraisal. This is important as SMBs tend to experience frequent business changes necessary to satisfy continual and, at times, explosive growth.

There's no clear starting and ending point and no two companies will start in the same place. Each organization is different. ITIL provides flexibility in approach, not requiring a specific methodology. Therefore, common advice is to look at present processes and see which comes closest to matching the processes described in either the Service Support or the Service Delivery books. An organization can start anywhere, select only certain elements and can grow and mature with the framework.

Keep in mind, ITIL does not describe in absolute terms HOW any of the ITIL processes should be implemented. The details are left up to the implementer. However, goals and key performance indicators for each process are well defined, so you have a clearly defined road map to measure success.

Although ITIL is regarded as the industry best practice for IT Service Management, many other best practices and frameworks exist to facilitate Service Management such as Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology (COBIT), Six Sigma and CMMi. Corporate control requirements such as Sarbanes-Oxley can also affect ITIL.

There are costs and rewards of using any approach. SMBs particularly need to take a balanced view when considering processes, while remembering that the ultimate goal is to solve business issues.

Numara Software is aware and committed to ITIL but careful to adopt those ITIL best practices that are practical for our customers. One of the first questions we ask our customers is, "What is your objective for utilizing the ITIL model?" This allows us to understand your IT strengths and capabilities and to customize the extent of ITIL training and resources that are most appropriate for your case.

For customers who choose to adopt ITIL best practices, our key staff are ITIL certified to offer guidance and good counsel. We are committed to providing solutions to help support the movement of businesses with varying IT complexity and needs through the business maturity model.

Numara Software will continue to improve and enhance ITIL processes and capabilities in our solutions and incorporate ITIL improvements based on current input and feedback from small and mid-sized businesses and customers.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



The author, Larry Desiano, is a Field Sales Engineer Manager and Best Practices Leader for Numara Software, Inc., with more than 30 years experience in the IT industry developing and supporting seamless, automated IT solutions for a variety of different industries and developing and overseeing IT support centers.

During the first 20 years of his career, Larry's focus was on implementing practical computer-based solutions and improving efficiencies using computer based systems. While working with Cooper Industries, he led the development and implementation of IT solutions varying from office and lab administration to manufacturing automation tools and was integrating solutions before the tools existed to do so.

He also helped companies modernize their internal IT organizations, such as creating Executive Information Systems and organizing centralized help desk solutions, as well as involvement in the "Factory to Future" initiative for Harris Corporation in the early 90's.

Since 1995 he has been heavily involved in the help desk industry and has become an expert in help desk, asset management and software deployment. He served at Network Associates for 7 years as a Sales Engineer, Team Lead and Product Manager helping grow and promote their help desk and desktop management product offerings.

Larry has been with Numara Software since 2002 where he continues to bridge the gap between product and customer. From his years of working with IT professionals, he provides real life input to product direction at Numara Software as well as sound advice to customers. Larry strongly believes that tools should work for you, not dictate how you should work, and is a strong influence on products at Numara Software.

Being ITIL certified, and from his years of hands-on experience with both large enterprise and small to medium sized businesses, Larry works closely with the Numara Software Product Management team regarding "what ITIL is and how Numara Track-It! maps to ITIL."

Larry holds a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering from Drexel University, is an active member of HDI and is a company thought-leader on popular subjects including: "The Anatomy of a Help Desk Call," "Driving Help Desk Efficiency" and "Demystifying ITIL."