



*Assessing IT Operations
Based on ITIL Best*

ITIL, the IT Infrastructure Library, seems to be everywhere these days. A set of books created by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) in the United Kingdom, ITIL has been adopted by organizations in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. The goal of these books is to define a framework for using best practices to manage information technology services.

by Steve Dreyer

Practices: A 5-Step Approach

ITIL is important to providing quality service support and delivery. But it is not a “one-size-fits-all” solution. While it may be the fashion of the day, many organizations find it difficult to implement. The books are quite detailed and the relationships between the various processes can be unclear to some, unless they are related to the specific workflows and requirements of the organization wishing to implement them.

Mature IT organizations probably have some of the ITIL processes implemented (perhaps without actually calling it ITIL). As an example, any company that has undergone a Sarbanes-Oxley review likely has variations of the ITIL Change Management process in place.

But ITIL can deliver far-reaching benefits. So, a question that organizations should be asking is, “What do I need to do to improve IT service management using ITIL as a guide?”

Five-Step Approach

A review of your IT service management function according to ITIL principles and best practices will help to create a baseline from which you can enhance service support and delivery. This review, described here, must

be structured to include the right individuals who are stakeholders in the processes being reviewed. It must also provide, in detail, specific recommendations for improvement.

The key participants in the project might include:

- Project sponsor, with overall project responsibility
- Review team, conducting the five steps
- Management to be interviewed
- Department representatives who will complete questionnaires
- IT staff providing information about current processes and issues they address.

The review will be conducted by a “review team” that can include an independent outside firm or an internal group that has appropriate skills (and time), selected by senior management. But in any case, there must be a project sponsor who owns the process and is responsible for directing the project team. The project sponsor is typically part of the senior management staff who is familiar with the stakeholders and their departmental functions, at least as they relate to the overall business and the IT support department.

Step 1: Project Initiation and ITIL Review

The first step in the five-step approach is to conduct a project initiation session. The initiation session should begin with the project sponsor and the review team. It will include an overview of the project tasks to be performed, a decision as to who will participate in the project, data and documentation that will be collected, the project timeline, and deliverables at the end of each step in the process.

Participants will attend a meeting together so that everyone becomes aware of the project plan, and is informed of everyone's roles and responsibilities. Participants will have an opportunity to provide input to the direction of the project and any specific issues and concerns that they may want addressed.

A review of ITIL processes will serve as an educational exercise and provide a specific framework for the interviews, questionnaires, and evaluation of current processes that follow. It will be the project sponsor's responsibility to help define which of the service management ITIL processes will be reviewed. For example, the sponsor may focus only on Service Support processes—Incident, Problem, Change, Configuration, and/or Release Management. Or, it may be decided that the Service Delivery areas are to be evaluated (Service Level Management, Financial Management for IT Services, IT Continuity Management, or Capacity and Availability Management.)

Deliverables from this step include a definition of project roles and responsibilities, documentation to be collected and reviewed, people to be interviewed, and a project timeline.

Step 2: Structured Interviews with Management

Interviews are a key step in developing a baseline for assessing current IT service management operations, understanding business needs to be addressed, and ultimately meeting project expectations. The project sponsor has already decided on how many interviews will take place with stakeholders from various departments that either direct the service management function or depend on its proper functioning.

Interviews are always more successful if you've prepared structured questionnaires and distributed them ahead of time to the participants. This allows interviewees to prepare. Questionnaires provide a more consistent way to score or evaluate the results across all interviews. Topics for the interview might include department overview and

mission, service management requirements, critical success factors that the review team should incorporate into the analysis, and the interviewee's experience with the current IT support function.

The information gathered during this step should be factored into the evaluation of the current state of service management and where there are "gaps" between that state and the desired service management operation.

Deliverables from this step might include interview notes, key issues, and processes that should be evaluated by the review team.

Step 3: Observation and Data Collection

Observing the IT service management function is a key responsibility of the review team. This will provide a high level "feel" for whether there are orderly transitions between IT support processes. For example, the review team should note information on call flows, problem management, change management, and other ITIL processes being reviewed during the assessment. The following, among other items, will be of particular interest:

- How calls for support are reviewed and logged in the help desk system
- Call escalation procedures
- Process for notifying customers about their issues and resolutions
- How issues are resolved and documented
- How issues relate to requests for change and how they are communicated and tracked

I also recommend the use of questionnaires with respect to each of the ITIL processes being reviewed. The questionnaires should be based on ITIL best practices and should be distributed to the project stakeholders designated by the sponsor. For example, the Change Management questionnaire should have specific questions such as:

- Is there a formal Change Advisory Board (CAB)?
- Are priorities and categories for change well-defined?
- Is there a formal process for emergency changes?

I recommend a scoring system that allows participants to provide their sense of how well the organization meets a particular ITIL process. The results of the questionnaires should be tabulated to provide an overall score, which will provide the baseline for the organization's conformance to ITIL.

Deliverables from this step include observation notes, specific issues uncovered during the observations, questionnaire results, and a baseline from which to measure the “GAP” between the current state of IT support and a desired state that includes ITIL best practices and management’s direction uncovered during the interviews.

Step 4: Gap Analysis

The gap analysis phase will help identify the variance between business requirements and the current state of your service management operation. By leveraging key information gathered in the interviews, observations, and questionnaires, it becomes possible to identify and document specific “gaps” between best practices and existing procedures.

Analyzing and prioritizing these gaps will allow for the development of a customized action plan that addresses the organization’s needs while applying industry best practices.

The review team should consider interview and observation notes, combined with questionnaire results to document a baseline for current processes. This same data should also be analyzed for comparison to key objectives of the organization. Together, this information will allow the team to document the variance between where the organization currently is and where it should be, based on business requirements and best practice ITIL processes.

Tasks in the gap analysis may include:

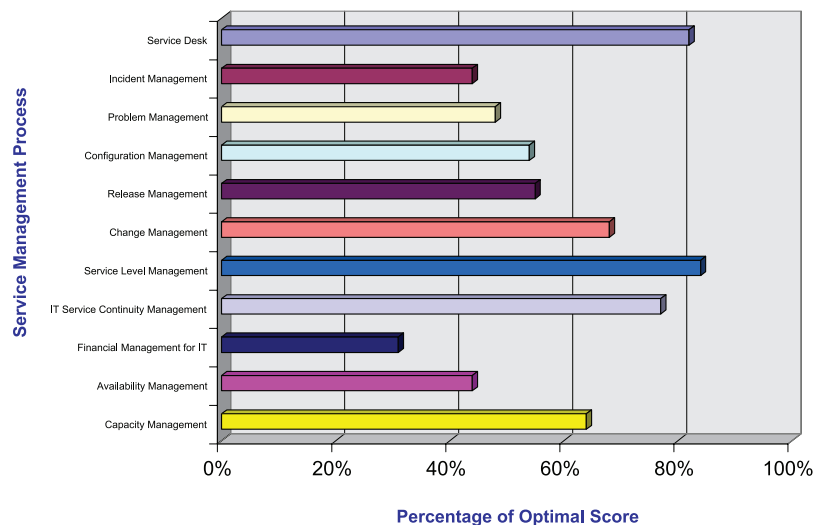
- Review interview notes and identify and prioritize goals and requirements
- Analyze survey results and consider trends and major gap areas
- Review observation notes and documentation, and assess current state of the service management operation

The deliverable will be a document that provides an analysis of each of the ITIL processes under review and the gaps that have been identified. These gaps will provide the basis for the last step, in which specific recommendations and an action plan are provided to the project sponsor.

Step 5: Action Plan

The gap analysis is the basis for the recommendations for addressing deficiencies and weaknesses related to ITIL best practices. The action plan should be specific to

Response Summary Chart - Best Practice Report Card



each of the processes under study. I recommend that the planned actions and tasks be grouped according to timeframe for completion.

Anyone who has participated or managed this type of project knows that management buy-in is important to the success of the ongoing improvement program. To this end, make sure that the review team considers initial improvement tasks that combine low cost, high benefit, and high probability of success.

The key deliverable will be an action plan that will be a practical, living document that includes:

- Gaps and issues identified
- Recommendations and action items
- Benefits to the organization

This action plan, together with project documentation, will provide a detailed roadmap for enhancing the IT service management function according to ITIL best practices.

Steve Dreyer is CEO and founder of SMA Management Systems, an IT service management consulting firm and systems integrator, incorporated in 1984. The firm specializes in IT assessments and best-in-class service management product solutions for help desks, asset management and reporting. The company’s Web site is www.smasystems.com and e-mail address is info@smasystems.com.