

Choking on ITIL? A Menu for Success ...

Food for thought

“Frankly, I’m desperate – I’m choking” is a phrase I’ve become familiar with over the years. Faced with a daily diet of conflicting business priorities, resistant staff and increasing pressure to reduce costs, many IT Directors and Service Managers bear a striking resemblance these days to someone asked to suck an elephant up a straw. In an attempt to wet the appetite, an ITIL menu is rolled out. However, grasping at ITIL as a saviour for all ills without comprehensive forethought, analysis and planning is folly.

What’s the dish of the day?

Chef’s special starter offers how ITIL can enable your organisation to adapt rapidly to changing market conditions and service constraints lightly sautéed on a bed of crisp, green cost savings. The dish of the day tantalises the taste buds with how implementing ITIL can leverage maximum value from your strategic partnerships. For dessert Sir? Madam? Let me tempt you with our double cream, extra thick service continuity `n’ high availability gateaux, lightly drizzled with consistency and robustness. “What’s the house wine (sic)?” “A devilish, fruity little number preferred by most IT staff; Chateaux IT’IL Never Happen If We Resist Enough; 2002, 2003 or 2004 – a superb year for suppliers”.

At worst, ITIL can prove to be an expensive set of processes and procedures nobody in your organisation follows. At best, it formalises common sense; adding value to your daily operations, internal and external relationships and, can fully flex in concert with your Corporate Strategy. But, only if you don’t choke to death trying to stuff it all in at one sitting.

ITIL’s exquisite beauty lies in its simplicity, flexibility and risk management emphasis. In all its implemented glory with internal processes dovetailing into your 3rd party supplier processes, everyone knows who’s doing what and

when. Indeed, research carried out on behalf of the ITSMF shows that of those questioned regarding the use and benefits of ITIL, 97% said their organisation had derived benefits; 70% of these describing these benefits as tangible and measurable.

Are you hungry for it?

You wouldn't spend your hard earned cash on a new, expensive car without researching the quality and having a test drive unless you had money to burn. However, it's surprising how organisations will begin implementing ITIL before researching some of the basics and asking a few simple questions such as; will it save us money? Will it add value to our activities or the value chain? Will it enable us to become more agile? Will it improve our customer service and perception?

It can be frustrating being a senior executive, wanting desperately to actually achieve something tangible for the organisation but feeling like a flea in a jar - jumping up and down but just hitting your head on the lid. Having previously witnessed the benefits and opportunities implementing ITIL or some of its components can bring, it's tempting to blindly assume that as it all worked perfectly well before it must work in your current organisation. Think before you jump.

What do you want or need to achieve within the context of your current organisation? What is it you *think* you'll achieve by implementing ITIL? Generally, the identification of perhaps 2 or 3 high level, key objectives is an excellent start. A maximum of three objectives focuses the mind. Any more than 3 and the bar may appear just too high to hurdle. Objectives could be:-

- Realise savings of at least 10% in next year's budget.
- Demonstrate a tangible improvement in delivery of services to our customers by 20% within one year.
- Pre-empt and mitigate risk thereby improving systems and infrastructure availability by 30% within one year.

Others may include:

- Improve two-way communications between the IT Department and the business
- Involve key business stakeholders in our decision making processes
- Ensure changes to our infrastructure don't create more problems.
- Improve and leverage maximum value from our 3rd party suppliers
- Create a more agile, process orientated IT Department
- Eliminate our blame culture
- Empower team members to take ownership and responsibility
- Create a culture of continuous improvement
- Create an achievement orientated team

Side salad or seasonal vegetables Sir?

Only the most naive senior executives these days fail to recognise the importance of creating an agile organisation. Able to flex and adapt to changing market conditions, technological innovations, fluctuating market share, profit margin and profitability. It's a tough, increasingly competitive world and if you don't take the initiative you can be sure someone else will. To survive and thrive in today's economy a core capability of successful organisations is *agility*.

Equally, keeping abreast of the organisations aims and objectives requires an agile IT Department. How agile are you? Do your customers have to wait 6 weeks or more for a new laptop? Do new employees arrive on their first day to find they're going to have to wait 3 days for a logon and email account? Does your overtime budget regularly take a hammering? Do you find yourself continually on the back foot having to explain systems downtime?

In encouraging the development of an agile IT Department one needs to firstly consider the individuals, their levels of change acceptance when implementing ITIL and personal loss which may be the resultant effect of the changes. Otherwise, no matter your expertise and knowledge, or that of your ITIL consultant, Service Manager or Implementation Project Manager, resistance will be high and the probability of success, in terms of gaining performance improvements and cost savings, will be low.

Heartburn

Be objective in assessing how much change the individuals within your team and organisation can tolerate. Research carried out by Buchanan, Claydon and Doyle (1999)¹ found that over 60% of managers said people in their business were suffering from change fatigue. In a second study (2000) it was found that just under half of respondents claimed that the pace of change was causing middle management burnout as with each change, people have to spend time:

- learning new tasks,
- implementing new systems and procedures
- developing new knowledge
- using new skills and behaviours and,
- all the above under severe time pressure due to having the `day job' to do as well.

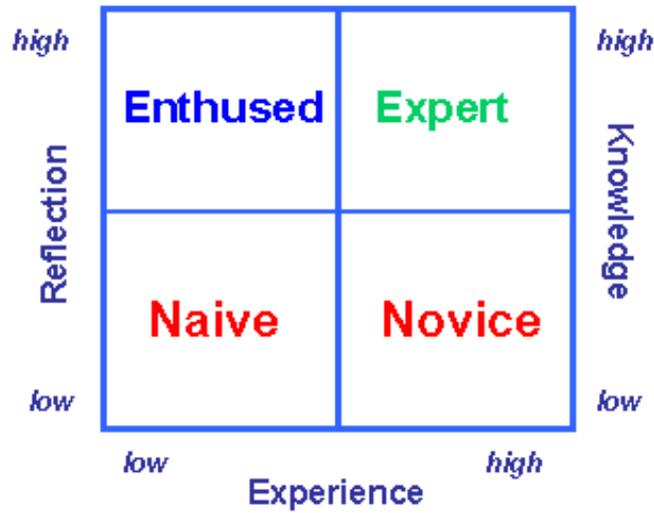
The cheque please!

If you've already tried to implement ITIL and failed then you need a rescuer and a rescue plan. You need an expert with experience of success *and* failure. Simply sending a team member on a course in the hope they'll come back with sufficient knowledge and experience to face up to the task is unrealistic - Jenson Button didn't learn how to race just by reading the Highway Code and passing his driving test. Use the Knowledge Box to assess your own or change agent's level of experience and reflection and the Menu for Success to guide your implementation strategy.

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¹ Buchanan, D.A., Claydon, T. and Doyle, M., 1999, `Organization development and change : the legacy of the nineties', Human Resource Management Journal, vol.9, no.2, pp.20-37

The Knowledge Box



1st plot the level of experience.

2nd plot the level of reflection.

$E+R = K$.

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ITIL Menu for Success

~ Starters ~

- **Seek out and listen to EVA** (Education, Verification and Advice). What do you know of ITIL? Find out and acquire as much knowledge as possible. Otherwise, how can you make critical decisions without losing team respect?
- **Understand your team's readiness for change.** Is the timing right? If your Department's already in chaos sort it out or you'll just create change fatigue.
- **Commitment.** Review Management Team commitment. Look for real commitment not simply lip service. If your management team aren't united behind you, or your team contains a TOM (totally objectionable manager), it's time to review your management team.
- **Clarify objectives.** Decide and be clear why you want or need to implement ITIL. Start with no more than 3 key objectives.
- **Enhance or create links.** With your Corporate or IT Departmental Strategy to put the project into context. If you don't already have a clearly defined and communicated strategy – develop one!

~ Main Courses ~

- **Set priorities.** Decide what the real priorities are. If you've an unstable infrastructure then implement Change and Release Management first; if reducing costs is the priority then forge ahead with Capacity and SLA Management. If customer perceptions need improving then focus on Incident and Problem Management. Start small, one component process at a time to avoid choking.
- **Start investing in training and education.** To create a critical mass of awareness. Training also allows for educated debate rather than stubborn resistance. Resist a stealth approach – it will fail.
- **Followers.** Lead them by example. By the example of your attitude, your enthusiasm, your behaviour.
- **Understand the risks.** Continually review risks: financial, strategic, operational and team moral.

~ Dessert ~

- **Lend support.** Be publicly, openly and frequently supportive of your key implementer(s). Remember, if they fail, you've failed. Any change agent is vulnerable and exposed to criticism by the very nature of the job. You have to show support even during times when you're not so sure yourself. Have your arguments or debates in private.

(+ 17.5% inspiration)

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