



Should you approve that ITIL initiative?



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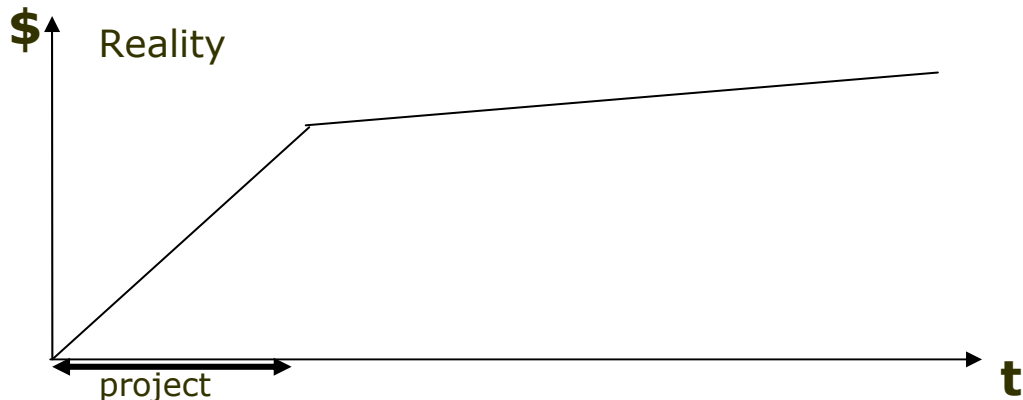
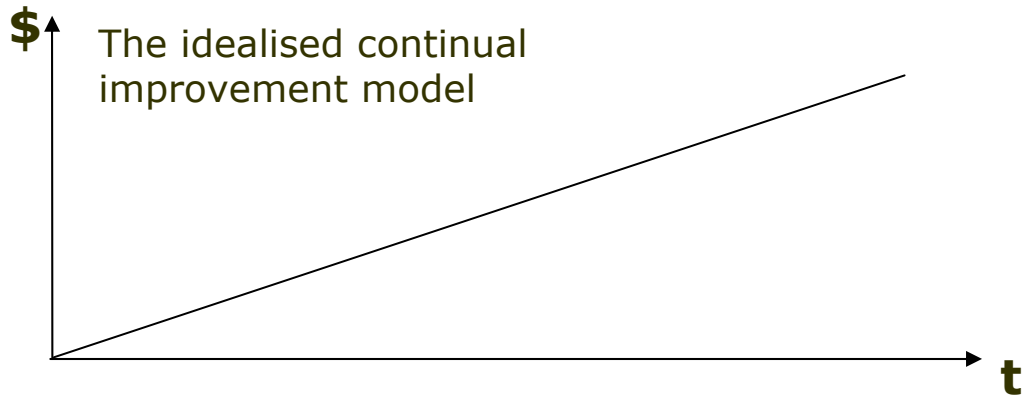
This document includes extracts from the IT Skeptic's book-in-preparation, *Owning ITIL*.

Is there such a thing as ITIL projects?

There is a school of thought that one does not “do” ITIL.

But:

- All ITIL initiatives need initial planning, analysis, design, organisation and promotion in order to overcome organisational inertia and establish momentum.
- In order to show return there needs to be some initial quick wins and visible progress.
- And most organisations use a project structure to gate funding.



Vetting ITIL projects

Proposed **IT projects should be examined on four levels:**

- The need/requirement/problem
 - Is there a good reason to do this?
- The expected return
 - Is it worth doing?
- Alignment with plans
 - Is it the kind of thing we should be focusing on?
- Their place in the project portfolio
 - Is it the best use of resources?

This applies as much to ITIL as to any IT project. But **many only get looked at to the first one or two levels**, especially if Excessive Technical Fastidiousness (ETF)¹ kicks in.

We examine some **hard questions to ask around the need/requirement/problem:**

- Best practice as an assumed given
- ITIL the Cult
- Because everyone else is
- You don't "do" ITIL
- If IT ain't broke don't fix it
- CMDB can not be done

Best practice as an assumed given

As New Zealand business commentator Mark Di Somma says²:

Focused and achieved excellence is powerful, whereas striving for excellence everywhere (and not achieving it anywhere) is much less competitive. Better to be unbreakable everywhere and unbeatable in selected places than to attempt to be unbeatable everywhere, and not get there!

Di Somma also said “**World class best practice looks like everyone else**”. Gaining a competitive edge or differentiating yourself is not about doing what everyone else does.

It is not ITIL that is the issue here, so much as **the uncritical acceptance of Best Practice as the only acceptable standard for everything**. Look at what CoPr says³:

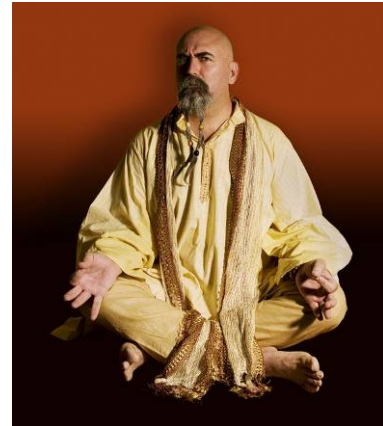
Best Practice has become something of a sacred cow in business... Pursuing Best Practice is a strategic decision, which should be taken when there is an agreed ROI (tangible or intangible) for the resource investment required to get there...

We believe the world is ready for Core Practice [CoPr]: the strategic decision to minimise cost in a discipline of the enterprise by implementing practices sufficient to (a) meet obligations and (b) to make processes work to a standard sufficient that risk (to the organisation and to people in its care) is reduced to some acceptable level.



ITIL the Cult

1. What defines “bad” process that “needs” ITIL?
 - Getting a low score on an ITIL maturity model.
2. What is that model benchmarked against?
 - The ITIL definition.
3. How do you get a better score?
 - By being more like the ITIL definition.
4. Who defines the model and then measures it?
 - The consultants who stand to profit from “fixing” the processes.



“This may work in practice, but I doubt it will work in theory”.

4

A movement that defines the problem in terms of its own proffered solution sounds like a cult.

What if we measured existing processes against independent assessable metrics on usefulness to the business or value returned on investment or quality, or whatever the organisation cares about?

We might find the existing processes don't fit the ITIL model but they work.

That is, we might find there is no business case for changing.

Because everyone else is



In a well-known survey⁵

- 72 percent claim the biggest barrier to ITIL adoption in their business is organizational resistance. At a very distant second, 34% are not sure where to start.
- ITIL is quickly becoming visible at the enterprise IT level, with 36 percent of respondents working on re-engineering enterprise IT service delivery, and 29 percent planning to leverage all 10 ITIL discipline areas.
- Most ITIL programs are living in a potentially dangerous vacuum. While 95% selected ITIL as a framework they are using to improve IT Operations, less than 20% even showed awareness of COBIT or CMMi.

These numbers scream out that people are embarking on ITIL projects because everyone else is.

They don't have the support of the organisation, they haven't looked at alternatives or context, and about a third are launching in holus-bolus, without proper planning, hacking away at everything. It is unlikely that a third of organisations have processes broken in all ten ITIL disciplines to such an extent that there is a good business case for fixing them.

You don't "do" ITIL

Watch for proposals that talk about "implementing ITIL" or "putting in place Incident Management" or "doing change management". This may point to limited understanding of ITIL (though everyone expresses it that way at times). **You don't implement a process, you improve it.**

Everyone does Incident Management. The question is how well they do it. This is usually measured by a CMM maturity level, from 1 to 5. If someone says they have no process, they do really: they are at level 1. Things still happen. People try to restore service. They just do it in an anarchic fashion.

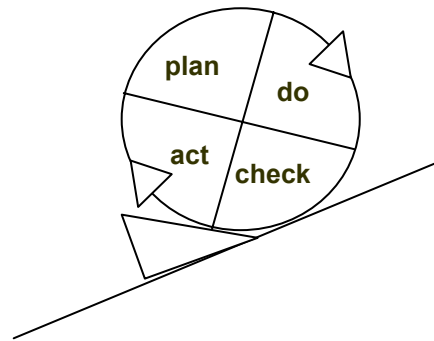
ITIL is about continuous service improvement, and it does it by providing **model processes to use as a target or ideal** in defining and documenting and measuring and managing and improving our own processes.

So you don't implement Incident Management: you try to lift your maturity in Incident Management, from say 1 to 3.

This improvement is a continuous process.

The initial project to enhance processes is only the first step. There must be an ongoing quality improvement program to protect, consolidate, and build on any gains made, or else the organisation will slip back again. If you are familiar with the Deming Cycle, look for its application.

If there is **no provision for ongoing maintenance of the processes** in the proposal - if they are not "chocking the wheel" of the Deming Cycle - then this is another indicator of inadequate understanding of the fundamentals.



If IT ain't broke don't fix it

The IT Skeptic has renovated three houses now. In all cases they were fit for habitation already. It was not money well spent: the house didn't leak, the doors were secure, it was sanitary and there was no fire risk. So renovation was just for our own satisfaction. It was overcapitalising - we would not get a good ROI when we sold the house.

Now if I want to spend my money changing the way my house looks it is my right: it is my money. ITIL project money isn't mine. So often, adopting ITIL is like ripping up perfectly good carpet so you can polish the floorboards: **it is very satisfying but there is no business case for it.**

IT operations are a domain that tends to attract perfectionists. This is a good thing when sites are aiming for three-, four- or five-nines [99.999% availability]. **The unfortunate aspect of perfectionists is that they can't leave well enough alone.**

Others make changes because change is power. That great business commentator of the late 20th century, Scott Adams said⁶: "**change is good for the people who are causing the change.** They understand the new information that is being added to the universe. They grow smarter in comparison to the rest of us".

Then we have that phenomenon The New CIO (or Operations Manager). You know the one: brought in to make some changes. Or because they are new they feel the need to make some changes. **Good managers find what works and leave it alone.**

CMDB can not be done

CMDB can not be done as ITIL defines it with a justifiable return on the investment of doing it - it is such an enormous undertaking that any organisation attempting it is going to burn money on an irresponsible scale. Organisations that need to get their Configuration Management processes to a CMM maturity of 4 or 5 are probably going to have to attempt it; others will generally struggle to cost-justify the effort.

Put another way: a company could put a man on the moon. It would be great marketing. Whether that would be the best use of funds is another matter.

The requirements are complex, especially the amount of data to be gathered and maintained, the integration of systems, and the compliance and audit requirements.



People are doing fine without CMDB now. In statistics for implementation of ITIL processes, Configuration Management is always one of the lowest percentages. For example, Incident-Problem-Change works fine on top of a single asset database. It is not that important whether Availability or Release or Continuity or Financial or other disciplines use the same repository – the perfectionists love it if they do but there is no great downside if they do not.

It is nice to store those basic “depends on” links to show the key CIs which services depend on. My experience is that most organisations can manually maintain these service mappings for about ten to fifty services. Yet most have two to ten times that many services. They all seem to end up pragmatically picking the top services to store the mappings in the database. What happens to the rest? **They wing it; they work it out on the fly;** like they always did. It works.

Alternatives to ITIL: Frameworks

The ITSM Library⁷

For interesting historical reasons, itSMF find themselves owning and approving an "alternate" set of books originating out of the Netherlands, mostly based around ITIL but often cheaper and often easier to follow.

MOF⁸

MOF from Microsoft is of course focused on their own Windows environment. It is a little different to ITIL (how unusual that Microsoft should create their own, slightly incompatible, version of a standard). Talk is always that future versions will 'return to the fold'.

USMBOK⁹

This framework is mostly driven by one individual, Ian Clayton. It is a major body of work, with vocal supporters. It remains to be seen what momentum it can develop.

HDI¹⁰

A guide published by the Help Desk Institute takes, not surprisingly, a call-centre slant on ITIL.

COBIT¹¹

The IT Skeptic believes that COBIT has matured to the point where the supporting books constitute a body of knowledge (BOK) that is coming close to a credible alternative to ITIL.

“Small” frameworks

ITIL in SITU¹²

This is an official ITIL book that attempts to scale ITIL down for smaller businesses. It looks useful but note that smaller organisations is not the same thing as SME (small to medium enterprise). ITIL Small-scale is about as light as some 'lite' snack foods: it is still a lot to digest.

FITS¹³

FITS does not get anything near the attention it deserves. Developed for UK schools, it is a nice simplification of ITIL that really is workable in an IT shop of one person or a few people.

ISM¹⁴

The “out-of-the-box solution for IT Service management”. Always a bold claim but if anyone can pull it off Jan van Bon can.

CoPr¹⁵

A conceptual framework exists but virtually no content and even less community support... so far. (Disclosure: the author wrote CoPr).

Alternatives to ITIL: Benchmarks

ITIL does not benchmark. There is no agreed standard for measuring ITIL. ITIL is about defining "how" not "how well".

ISO20000¹⁶

ISO 20000 is the closest thing to an "ITIL assessment standard". It is not 100% the same as ITIL. There are major extensions to ITIL and some differences.

COBIT

COBIT (or the lighter COBIT Quickstart¹⁷) is a "checklist" for audit, with recent focus due to Sarbanes-Oxley compliance.

eSCM¹⁸

eSourcing Capability Model provides incremental assessment for IT services: it includes both a service provider model and a client model. eSCM contains both a best practices model and an assessment methodology.

ITS-CMM¹⁹

The IT Service Capability Maturity Model also uses the CMM maturity measurement model. It has had little uptake since its release in January 2005. It seems to be the proverbial "three guys in a garage" who have taken the "build it and they will come" approach. Guys, they won't.



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He is best known as The IT Skeptic (www.itskeptic.org), a critical voice in the ITSM community.

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