



What is ITIL®

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What is ITIL and what are its origins?

ITIL (formerly the IT Infrastructure Library®) is the most widely adopted framework for IT service management in the world. Simply put, ITIL is a set of books that provide best practice guidance to service providers on:

- The provision of quality IT services
- The processes, functions and capabilities needed to support those services

In the early 80's, the UK's Office of Government Commerce recognized that utilizing consistent practices for all aspects of a service lifecycle could assist in driving organizational effectiveness and efficiency as well as predictable service levels. Thus, ITIL was born. Now in its third edition, ITIL guidance continues to be a successful mechanism to drive consistency, efficiency and excellence into the business of managing IT services.

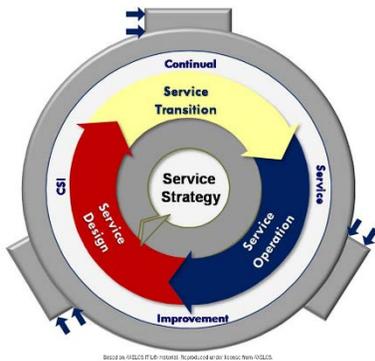
ITIL is used by many hundreds of organizations around the world and offers best-practice guidance applicable to all types of organizations. ITIL is not a standard that has to be followed word-for-word; it is guidance that should be read, understood, and then used to create value for the service provider and its customers. Organizations are encouraged to adopt ITIL best practices and to adapt them to their specific environments in ways that meet their needs.

ITIL Core consists of five lifecycle publications that each provides part of the guidance necessary for an integrated approach as required by ISO/IEC 20000. **ISO/IEC 20000** is the international standard for IT service management. The five publications are:

- **ITIL® Service Strategy** – defines the perspective, position, plans and patterns that a service provider must execute to meet an organization's business outcomes
- **ITIL® Service Design** – designs IT services and the governing IT practices, processes and policies to realize the service provider's strategy
- **ITIL® Service Transition** – ensures that new, modified, retired or transferred services meet the expectations of the business
- **ITIL® Service Operation** – coordinates and carries out the activities and processes required to deliver and manage services at agreed levels to business users and customers
- **ITIL® Continual Service Improvement** – aligns IT services with changing business needs by identifying and implementing improvements

The core publications are expected to provide structure, stability and strength to service management capabilities, with durable principles, methods and tools. This serves to protect investments and provide the necessary basis for measurement, learning and improvement.

Complementary ITIL publications provide flexibility to implement the core in a diverse range of environments such as specific industry sectors, organization types, operating models and technology architectures.



ITIL Core is built around a **service lifecycle**. Each stage of the lifecycle exerts influence on the others and relies on them for inputs and feedback. This constant set of checks and balances ensures that services are adapted as business needs change and that services are measured in terms of the value the business derives from those services.

Since ITIL is an approach to IT ‘service’ management, the concepts of services and service management must be discussed.

Services and Service Management

A **service** is a means of delivering value to customers by facilitating the outcomes customers want to achieve without the ownership of specific costs and risks. Services facilitate **outcomes**, or results, by enhancing the performance of tasks and by reducing the effect of constraints. These constraints may include regulatory controls, lack of funding or capacity, or technology limitations.

An **IT service** is a service provided by an IT service provider. A **service provider** is an organization that supplies services to one or more internal or external customers. An IT service is made up of a combination of information technology, people and processes.

IT has traditionally been focused on managing technology silos and on delivering infrastructure services such as hardware, network and other data center components. ITIL suggests a more holistic approach to managing services from end-to-end. This is because the use of IT has become the utility of business. Business today wants IT services that behave like other utilities such as water, electricity or the telephone. Simply having the best technology will not ensure that IT provides utility-like reliability. Professional, responsive, value-driven service management is what brings this quality of service.

The more mature a service provider’s capabilities are, the greater its ability to consistently produce quality services that meet the needs of its customer in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Service management is a set of specialized organizational capabilities for providing value to customers in the form of services.

The act of transforming capabilities and resources into valuable services is at the core of service management. Without these capabilities, a service organization is merely a bundle of resources that have relatively low intrinsic value for customers.

Service management is also a professional practice supported by an extensive body of knowledge, experience and skills. A global community of individuals and organizations in the public and private sectors fosters its growth and maturity. Formal schemes exist for the education, training and certification of practicing organizations and individuals. Industry best practices, academic research and formal standards contribute to and draw from its intellectual capital.

IT service management (ITSM) is the implementation and management of quality IT services that meet the needs of the business. IT service management is performed by IT service providers. A good relationship between an IT service provider and its customers relies on the customer receiving an IT service that meets its needs, at an acceptable level of performance and at a cost that the customer can afford. The IT service provider needs to work out how to achieve a balance between these three areas, and communicate with the customer if there is anything that prevents it from being able to deliver the required IT service at the agreed upon level of performance or price.

A service level agreement is used to document agreements between an IT service provider and a customer. A **service level agreement (SLA)** describes the IT service, documents service level targets, and specifies the responsibilities of the IT service provider and the customer. A single agreement may cover multiple IT services or multiple customers.

Service Providers

There are three main types of service providers. While most aspects of service management apply equally to all types of service providers, others aspects such as customers, contracts, competition, market spaces (i.e., exploitable opportunities), revenue and strategy take on different meanings depending on the specific type. The three types are:

- Type I – **internal service provider** – embedded within a business unit
- Type II – **shared services unit** – provides shared IT services to more than one business unit
- Type III – **external service provider** – provides IT services to external customers

Many organizations have a combination of IT service providers. For example, in a single organization it is possible that some IT units are dedicated to a single business unit, others provide shared services, and yet others have been outsourced or depend on external service providers.

Stakeholders in Service Management

A **stakeholder** is a person who has an interest in an organization, project, IT service, etc. Within a service provider organization, there are many different stakeholders including the functions, groups and teams that deliver services. There are also stakeholders external to the service provider organization, such as:

- **Customers** – who buy goods or services. The customer of an IT service provider is the person or group who defines and agrees upon the service level targets. This term is also sometimes used informally to mean user. For example, ‘This is a customer-focused organization.’
- **Users** – use services on a day-to-day basis. Users are distinct from customers, as some customers do not use the IT service directly.
- **Suppliers** – third parties responsible for supplying goods or services that are required to deliver IT services. Examples include hardware and software vendors, network and telecom providers, and outsourcing organizations.

Internal customers work in the same organization as the IT service provider. **External customers** work for other organizations. Many IT organizations who traditionally provided services only to internal customers, now find that they are dealing directly with external customers because of the online services that they provide.

Utility and Warranty

The value of a service can be defined as the level to which that service meets a customer's expectations. Services contribute value to an organization only when their value is perceived to be higher than the cost of obtaining the service. From the customer's perspective, value consists of achieving business objectives. The value of a service is created by combining two primary elements: utility and warranty.

Utility (fitness for purpose) is the functionality offered by a product or service to meet a particular need. Utility can be summarized as 'what the service does' and can be used to determine whether a service is able to meet its required outcomes. For example, a service that enables a business unit to process orders should allow sales people to access customer details, stock availability, shipping information, etc. Any aspect of the service that improves the ability of sales people to process sales orders would be considered utility. Utility can therefore represent any attribute of a service that removes, or reduces the effect of, constraints on the performance of a task.

Warranty (fitness for use) is an assurance that a product or service will meet its agreed upon requirements. This may be a formal agreement such as a service level agreement or contract, or a marketing message or brand image. Warranty refers to the ability of a service to meet customers' needs in terms of availability, capacity, continuity, and security. Warranty can be summarized as 'how the service is delivered.'

Customers cannot benefit from something that is fit for purpose but not fit for use, and vice versa. The value of a service is therefore only delivered when both utility and warranty are designed and delivered.

Best Practices in the Public Domain

In an effort to be more competitive and better meet their customers' needs, organizations often benchmark themselves against their peers and seek to close gaps in their capabilities. One way to close such gaps is the adoption of widely-used industry best practices. Sources for best practice include public frameworks, standards and the proprietary knowledge of organizations and individuals. Proprietary knowledge – also known as 'tribal knowledge' – is often deeply embedded in organizations and can be customized to the point of being idiosyncratic. Because such tacit knowledge is often poorly documented, it can be difficult to adopt, replicate or even transfer from one party to another.

Publicly available frameworks and standards such as ITIL, Lean, Six Sigma, COBIT, CMMI, PRINCE2, PMBOK®, ISO 9000, ISO/IEC 20000 and ISO/IEC 27001 are validated across a diverse set of environments and situations rather than the limited experience of a single organization.

Ignoring public frameworks and standards can needlessly place an organization at a disadvantage. Organizations should cultivate their own proprietary knowledge on top of a body of knowledge based on public frameworks and standards. Collaboration and coordination across organizations become easier when shared practices and standards are in place.

Basic Concepts

Assets, Resources and Capabilities

The relationship between a service provider and its customers revolves around the use of assets – both those of the service provider and those of the customers.

An **asset** is any resource or capability. Capabilities represent an organization’s ability to coordinate, control and deploy resources to produce value. Capabilities are typically experience-driven, knowledge-intensive, information-based and firmly embedded within an organization’s people, systems, processes and technologies. It is relatively easy to acquire resources compared to capabilities.

Capabilities	Resources
Management	Financial capital
Organization	Infrastructure
Processes	Applications
Knowledge	Information
People (experience, skills and relationships)	People (number of employees)

Based on ITIL® ITSM Academy Framework document from V4.0.0

Processes

A **process** is a structured set of activities designed to accomplish a specific objective. A process takes one or more defined inputs and turns them into defined outputs. To be viewed as effective, a process must produce outputs that satisfy its customers’ requirements.

Each ITIL Core publication includes guidance on a specific set of IT service management processes. Many of these processes span the service lifecycle and work together as an integrated system to support the ultimate objective of business value realization; just as the stages of the service lifecycle work together.

Well-defined processes can improve productivity within and across organizations and functions.

Functions

A **function** is a team or group of people and the tools or other resources they use to carry out one or more processes or activities. In larger organizations, a function may be broken out and performed by several departments, teams and groups, or it may be embodied within a single organizational unit (e.g., the Service Desk). In smaller organizations, one person or group can perform multiple functions. For example, a Technical Management department could also incorporate the Service Desk function.

ITIL describes the following functions in detail:

- **Service Desk** – single point of contact for users when there is a service disruption, for service requests, or for some requests for change. The service desk provides a point of communication to the users and a point of coordination for several IT groups and processes.

- **Technical Management** – custodian of the technical skills and resources needed to support the ongoing operation of IT services and the management of the IT infrastructure (i.e., all the hardware, software, networks, facilities, and so forth required to deliver services). Technical Management plays an important role in the design, testing, release and improvement of IT services.
- **IT Operations Management** – executes the daily operational activities needed to manage IT services and the supporting IT infrastructure. This is done according to the performance standards defined during Service Design. IT Operations Management has two sub-functions that are generally organizationally distinct. These are IT Operations Control and Facilities Management.
- **Application Management** – custodian of the technical skills and resources needed to manage applications throughout their lifecycle. ITIL views application management differently than application development. The Application Management function supports and maintains operational applications once they have been deployed. Application Management also plays an important role in the design, testing and improvement of applications that form part of IT services, whether those applications are developed in-house (e.g., by an application development team) or obtained from external suppliers.

Roles

A number of roles need to be performed during the service lifecycle. A **role** is a set of responsibilities, activities and authorities granted to a person or team. A role is defined in a process or function. One person or team may have multiple roles – for example, the roles of Configuration Manager and Change Manager may be carried out by a single person.

Roles are often confused with job titles but they are not the same. Each organization will define job titles and job descriptions that suit their needs. Individuals holding these job titles can perform one or more of the defined roles. Generic roles defined in ITIL include:

- **Service owner** – accountable for a service
- **Process owner** – accountable for overall process quality
- **Process manager** – accountable for operational management of a process
- **Process practitioner** – responsible for carrying out one or more process activities

The Service Portfolio

The **service portfolio** is the complete set of services that is managed by a service provider and it represents the service provider's commitments and investments across all customers and market spaces. The service portfolio represents all the resources presently engaged or being released in various stages of the service lifecycle. It is a database or structured document with three parts:

- **Service pipeline** – all services that are under consideration or development but are not yet available to customers

- **Service catalog** – all live services and those available for deployment
- **Retired services** – all services that have been phased out, decommissioned or retired

The service catalog is the only part of the service portfolio published to customers and is used to support the sale and delivery of services.

Service providers often find it useful to distinguish customer-facing services from supporting services. **Customer-facing services** are IT services that are visible to customers. Examples include online banking services offered by a financial institution, or internet access at an airport. **Supporting services** are IT services that support or ‘underpin’ the customer-facing services. These are typically invisible to the customer, but are essential to the delivery of customer-facing IT services. Examples may include directory services, the network or communication services.

The Service Knowledge Management System

Quality knowledge and information enable people to perform process activities and support the flow of information between service lifecycle stages and processes. Understanding, defining, establishing and maintaining information is a responsibility of the knowledge management process. A **service knowledge management system (SKMS)** is a set of tools and databases used to manage knowledge and information. Implementing an SKMS enables effective decision support and reduces the risks that arise from a lack of knowledge and information.

Organizational Culture and Behavior

Organizational culture is the set of shared values and norms that control a service provider’s interactions with its stakeholders, including customers, users, suppliers, and internal staff. An organization’s values are desired modes of behavior that affect its culture. Examples of organizational values include high standards, customer care, respecting tradition and authority, acting cautiously and conservatively, and being frugal.

Change related to service management programs will affect organizational culture. Effective communication plans, training, and clear policies and procedures are all needed to achieve the desired performance outcomes and enable collaboration between the many different people involved in service management. Culture change and progress cannot happen without the support of people like you. Take action! Contribute to your organization’s IT service management effort by expanding your knowledge of best practices and by enthusiastically using what you learn to lead process implementation and improvement activities. Be a change champion!

Getting Started

ITIL, like any framework, methodology, body of knowledge or philosophy, is only as valuable as the results it helps to achieve. How the practices are applied is critical. It is necessary at all times to remember what is to be accomplished and *why* it needs to be accomplished. Following book examples

or practices blindly, without considering their appropriateness to the organization's circumstances, needs, goals and objectives is a certain way to fail. Success requires the application of critical judgement.

So, when using ITIL:

- **Adopt** – Commit to adopting a service-oriented, customer-focused culture. Success in service management is based on a genuine commitment to this change. Evidence of such commitment can be seen not in the way the people in an organization talk, but rather in the way in which they behave and in how those behaviors are incentivized.
- **Adapt** – Strive to understand ITIL best practices, to understand why they are recommended, and then to apply critical thought to adapting those best practices to the organization's circumstances, needs, goals and objectives.

Once ITIL recommendations are understood at a critical level, it is possible to successfully assess their value to your organization in the context of the organization's vision, goals, objectives, circumstances and constraints. In this way, real value can be delivered to customers and captured by the organization.

Guiding Principles

At the heart of ITSM is a powerful cultural shift from focusing on technology to focusing on services. This means concerning ourselves with the outcomes that technology must enable for the customer, how that will deliver value, and dedicating the service provider to continual improvement. Successful adoption of this new mind-set will be more likely if all aspects of the effort are guided by the following principles:

- **Focus on value** – map everything, directly or indirectly, to value for the customer and/or business; it is the customer who determines what is of value
- **Design for experience** (customer experience) – focus also on the end-to-end experience of customers and users
- **Start where you are** – leverage what's already available
- **Work Holistically** – all aspects need to work harmoniously together to deliver results – focus on the bigger picture rather than single elements
- **Progress Iteratively** – organize work into manageable sections, with clear goal posts
- **Observe Directly** – base decisions on objective information to ensure efficient use of resources
- **Be Transparent** – be open about ongoing initiatives to gain buy-in from all stakeholders
- **Collaborate** – work together and match skills to tasks to ensure buy-in, relevance and long-term success
- **Keep it Simple** – eliminate processes, services, metrics etc. that provide no value; focus efforts on only those that reap benefits

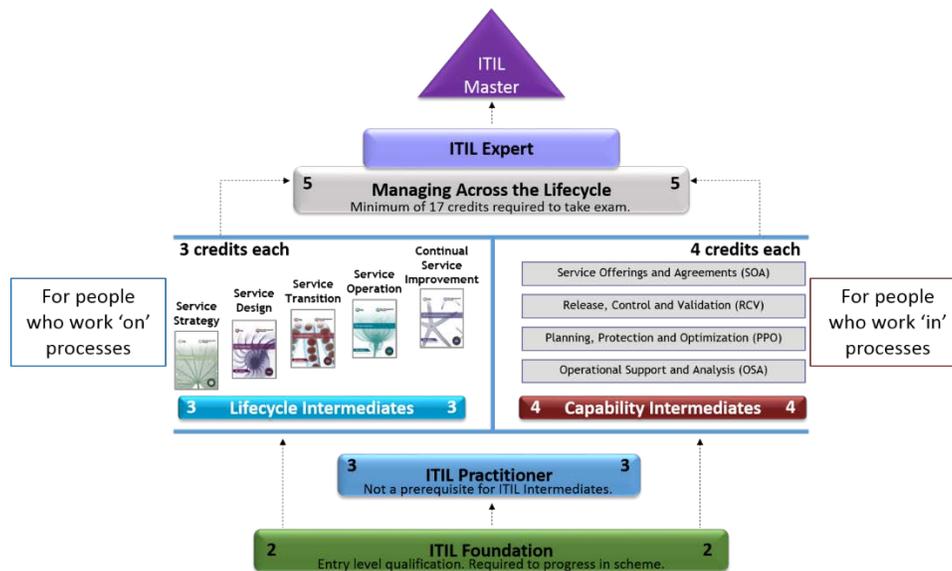
These guiding principles, introduced in the publication *ITIL® Practitioner Guidance*, distil the core messages of ITIL specifically and ITSM in general, and can be used to facilitate improvement activities of all types and at all levels.

These guiding principles are also reflected in many of the other frameworks, methods, standards, philosophies and/or bodies of knowledge that may be used in an organization, such as Lean, Agile, DevOps and others, allowing organizations to effectively integrate the use of multiple methods into an overall approach to providing services.

Want to Learn More?

Training helps service providers build and maintain their capabilities. Training also provides individuals the knowledge, skills and information needed to fill their role in the organization or achieve their career goals, along with a place to test and develop the confidence to use these skills in the workplace.

The ITIL® certification scheme provides a modular approach to the ITIL framework and is comprised of qualifications focused on different aspects of ITIL best practice to various degrees of depth and detail.



The tiered structure of the ITIL qualification scheme offers individuals flexibility relating to the different disciplines and areas of ITIL and the ability to focus their studies on key areas of interest.

[Click here to learn more about the ITIL Qualification Scheme.](#)

[Click here to register for one of ITSM Academy's ITIL classes today.](#)

We hope to see you in class soon!