Does the ITIL® Framework Need a Facelift?
By Malcolm Fry
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The ITIL® framework has been with us since the 1980s, providing guidance and standard practices, but it is not perfect. It provides a framework for IT service management (ITSM) and a reference for professionals to create their own bespoke IT service management (ITSM) service, but it does have some gaps and problems. Even the naysayers, the “ITIL detractors”, who claim it has no competition (which may be true), use ITIL terminology. That is how ingrained the ITIL framework is in the service desk / helpdesk world. But I think it’s time for the framework to get a facelift. Well, perhaps it’s not a facelift that’s needed but just some minor cosmetic surgery.

Before I share my top ten ITIL framework concerns (why I think a facelift is needed), I do believe that the ITIL framework is an excellent tool. So, my comments here are not meant to be a criticism but an encouragement to improve.

1. Relevance
2. Risk management (Threat)
3. Governance management – best practices
4. BYOD – tablets and smartphones
5. New Services Management
6. The Cloud
7. Configuring the unknown
8. Quality management
9. Infrastructure management
10. Paper-based approach
Relevance

The eternal problem for the ITIL framework has always been to remain relevant mainly because of the speed of change. For example, few of those involved with the ITIL framework would have had a tablet when the framework was last refreshed in 2011. The iPhone® and iPad® devices came to consumers in June 2007 and April 2010, but who could have predicted, rather than guessed, the impact these technologies would have on consumers? Relevancy could be achieved by having a subscription and issuing updates in the form of new and supplementary segments or by using online technology services. This will always be an issue but can be minimised if approached constructively.

Risk Management

Every day technology penetrates further into the fabric of our lives and businesses with IT providing services direct to customers and subscribers. This is not just changing the parameters of our lives but is setting new parameters. For example, in the UK, online betting services are now a prime sponsor of sports, especially football, while genealogy is now an online pastime, whereas DVD stores are disappearing, and book stores are struggling. Welcome to the new world. The problem is, the more dependent an organisation is on IT, the greater the risk of outages; yet risk management does not exist as a separate management component in the ITIL framework and lacks cohesion and presence. Risk management will become more and more pervasive and needs its own management function in the framework.
The business world, and indeed our personal worlds, is being affected by demand for rules and regulations under the guise of governance. We live in an increasingly regulated world. There are even those imposing rules to make sure we don’t hurt ourselves. In the UK, these people are known as ‘elf and safety,’ but there are good reasons why we need governance. Often, governance is achieved by imposing best practices. If you look at the ITIL and COBIT® frameworks, you can see how one supplies the practices while the other, the controls. Best practices and governance are necessary to combat ever increasing threats of computer fraud, which is why we need more controls. The ITIL framework needs to address this need with a supplementary publication.

There is a school of thought that claims Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is a recent phenomenon. In fact, it has existed for many years, but there does seem to be some confusion as to whether bringing your device to the office is BYOD. If so, what about if you work from home but use your own device? Is that BYOD or Use Your Own Device (UYOD)? The figures for home workers do not denote that workers are using BYOD but clearly show the trend for remote working, which is increasing at an accelerated rate, which probably means that BYOD is doing the same.

Managing BYOD technologies and services are not supported well by the ITIL framework. They are facing the same problem we are - keeping abreast of the trend. Maybe the publication of a yearly update supplement would fit the bill here.
New services management

New services management has been a bone of contention between developers and ITSM, but with the business world demanding more and more new services, the pendulum is swinging towards ITSM. That is, properly tested and quality controlled acceptance of new services. You could argue that the ITIL framework is one, great big management of new services, and you would be correct. The trouble is, it is too big. One of its biggest weaknesses is the lack of questions that need to be answered before a new service can go live. A new service portfolio, with these questions and their answers, would enhance the ITIL framework.

The Cloud

One of the reasons for home working and the amazing adoption of tablets has been the emergence of cloud computing. The ITIL framework and the cloud are closely related, and because ITIL processes have a good business basis (e.g. change management is universal), it should be easy to update the ITIL approach to help ITSM professionals better manage cloud services.
Configuring the unknown

Configuration management is one of the mainstays of the ITIL framework and one of its key components. The problem is, if you are using cloud computing services, you are configuring the unknown as many of the technologies to supply modern services come from the cloud and are hidden from ITSM. So, the question is: how do you configure the unknown? Some guidance is required for overall configuration management and specifically, how to configure the unknown.

Quality management

Given the increasing levels of pressure and tighter deadlines, sometimes it is a miracle that IT management maintains any respectable levels of quality management. The ITIL framework does refer briefly to quality but without any structure or commitment. It appears in the Continual Service Improvement volume but only very briefly. The framework needs to create a quality approach that envelopes the service provided by ITSM. The Plan, Do, Check and Act model is getting a little tired or is being ignored.

Infrastructure management

The ITIL framework is published in a series of volumes. Why is there so little reference to infrastructure in the volumes? The infrastructure refers to everything you need to provide a service to a customer. You cannot provide services if your infrastructure is poor. Nowadays, the emphasis is on services rather than infrastructure. Either the ITIL framework needs to rediscover its roots or rename itself Information Technology Services Library.
My last concern is, that at the moment, the ITIL framework is a paper-based approach rather than an online service. Yes, there are electronic versions of the volumes but not a technology based service. Many of the concerns I have expressed here could be eliminated by an online service. For example, updates could be performed regularly with subscribers getting notifications of these updates, thus keeping the framework fresh and up-to-date. When emerging services and technologies appear, the publications can be updated accordingly. It’s time to step back and take the ITIL framework from a paper-based system to a fully electronic subscription based service.

The ITIL framework is a valuable tool that helps IT service management deliver top class services to its customers and will continue to do so, but it needs a refresh. Not in content but in format, which at present is printed volumes and paper-based exam centric architecture.

About the Author

As a recognised IT industry luminary with more than 40 years of experience in IT, Malcolm Fry serves as a Cherwell Software™ ambassador, bringing an unparalleled breadth of knowledge on IT business and technical issues.

Malcolm is the author of many publications on IT service and support and is regularly contacted as a source of information by technology journalists. Some of his publications include: A Step-by-Step Guide to Building a CMDB, Building an ITIL®-based Service Management Department, and ITIL® Lite: A road map to full or partial ITIL Implementation.

Malcolm was also a member of the ITIL Advisory Group and a mentor for the ITIL® Service Transition book. In April 2009, he was awarded the prestigious Ron Muns Lifetime Achievement Award for IT Service and Support.