

The ITIL® Framework: And How It Can Improve Your Service Desk

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Over the past few years, IT infrastructures have become incredibly complex, while the demand for reliable and efficient service continues to grow. Combined with on-going budget cuts, this creates unprecedented challenges for IT departments. However, these obstacles can be overcome through the application of best practices, user empowerment, process automation, and adherence to management procedures at all stages of service delivery.

When dealing with IT Service Management (ITSM), a service desk acts as the central point of communication between users and IT thus playing an increasingly vital role within an organization. With a capable service desk solution, simple tasks such as registering and tracking incoming requests, scheduling internal IT activities to address reported issues, and notifying customers or employees when issues get resolved are well understood.

According to Lisa Erickson-Harris, research director at **Enterprise Management Associates (EMA)**, the leading independent industry analyst and consulting firm dedicated to the IT management market: “The service desk is right in the middle of the service value chain as CMDB initiatives, change management, the service catalog, and next generation asset management all come together often linking directly through the service desk tools and processes.”

For an even more efficient service desk, the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL®) is an important framework to follow. ITIL is widely recognized as a system of best practices for IT departments and service desks. While the basic structure was developed during the 1980s by IBM employee Edward A. Van Schaik, it was not until the mid-1990s that ITIL was widely adopted after being formalized by the United Kingdom’s Office of Government Commerce (OGC).

Today, ITIL is being embraced by organizations across the world, as it provides a best practice-based framework that integrates and centralizes incident management, problem management, configuration management, and change management within one service desk platform.

In July 2007, arguably the most expansive and dynamic version of ITIL was released with the advent of ITIL v3. ITIL v3 has taken the concept of best practice-based frameworks to the next level as it relates to the service desk. In ITIL v3, definitions for the services relevant to IT are now augmented with definitions for the associated delivery processes and complementary technologies.

The following are the core volumes of ITIL v3:

- **Service Strategy** - deals with the strategic management approach related to IT service management; strategic analysis, planning, positioning, and implementation of service models, strategies, and strategic objectives
- **Service Design** - translates strategic plans and objectives and creates the designs and specifications for execution through service transition and operations
- **Service Transition** - provides guidance on the service design and implementation, ensuring that the service delivers the intended strategy and that it can be operated and maintained effectively
- **Service Operation** - provides guidance on the management of a service through its day-to-day production life
- **Continual Service Improvement** - provides guidance on the measurement of service performance through the service life-cycle, suggesting improvements to ensure that a service delivers the maximum benefit

Expanding upon the value of ITIL v3, EMA notes that the adoption of the ITIL framework by organizations is creating a shift in IT to more of a service management environment: “The service desk market has matured far beyond its roots as a simple help desk commonly found in the early 1980s. The IT Infrastructure Library and process maturation in broader IT environments has played a big role in this growth. ITIL adoption is creating sweeping transformation, moving IT from its historical silo-based culture to a business needs, service-driven environment.”

Over the last two-plus decades, a number of large organizations have implemented ITIL and reaped significant benefits. For example, Procter and Gamble has publicly stated that its adoption of ITIL has equated to nearly \$125 million in IT cost savings per year. In addition, Shell Oil optimized the ITIL framework for a global PC consolidation project which, as a result, helped the company complete software upgrades in less than three days, potentially saving \$5 million.

Beyond the pure quantifiable benefits that an ITIL implementation can deliver, there are also many qualitative benefits to be found. With the ITIL framework at the backbone of a service desk solution, organizations can accomplish the following:

- Improved Customer Satisfaction
- Improved IT Return on Investment (ROI)
- Enhanced Staff Morale and Productivity
- Reduced Staff Turnover
- Lower Staff Training Costs

According to **Info-Tech Research Group**, a global leader in providing IT research and advice, the firm’s studies have shown that introducing ITIL best practices can reduce service desk total cost of ownership (TCO) by a minimum of 10 percent.

“ITIL is the first step to a more mature, controlled service desk which can improve the overall quality and efficiency of service desk solution and give the organization better insight into the value of the IT department,” said Laura Hansen, research analyst with Info-Tech Research Group.

“As a best practice framework, ITIL extends to people, processes, and technology. Service desk staff can be trained and processes can be put in place; a good service desk software solution based on ITIL principles will facilitate and automate these processes to assist in creating a more optimized service desk with fewer IT department redundancies,” added Hansen.

For an ITIL implementation to be successful, it is important to realize that it would only work if the processes involved have proper support and a well understood goal before the transition begins. Any new initiative, and ITIL is no exception, would meet substantial resistance, unless the vision and the goal are clearly communicated, and a guiding committee is established. It is also critical to transition slowly from quick and measurable improvements to the full implementation of the long-term vision, securing one short-term win after another. This would serve both as encouragement for employees involved in the process, as well as the foundation for the next step. Both factors are equally important to consolidate improvements and gain momentum as the transition to ITIL progresses through its steps.

As more and more organizations implement solutions that support ITIL within their service desk products, they can truly leverage this proven and customizable framework to gain a competitive advantage, and deliver timely, quality service to employees and customers.



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