

Get a life! Don't read the ITIL V3 books 😊



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Introduction

Actually, I don't really mean for you to ignore the ITIL V3 books completely, but I must admit that 5 fairly big books covering the core scope can appear pretty daunting. When I'm travelling around giving presentations or carrying out consulting work, I often ask how many people in the audience have read the books. In one way I'm actually quite surprised at the relatively low percentage that put their hands up, but I always congratulate the people without their hands up as they must have more of a life than I have. Yep, I have to admit, I've read through the whole lot several times, but then you'd expect me, as a strategic Business Service Management consultant, to do that, wouldn't you?

For most people who are actively engaged in the operational and practical daily activity of service management, I don't think they need to read the whole thing. It's so easy to turn any best practice guidance, methodologies or standards in to dogma. It is worth remembering that ITIL, as with many other similar best practices, is intended to be 'adopt and adapt'. I always urge people to use the bits that help them, changing them to suit where needed, and ignore the bits that don't help them. There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer to many of the challenges we face in our jobs. ITIL is not a religion, it is best practice guidance!

The Impact/Response so far, one year later

Positive – it gets people thinking about how to do things better, and accepting some new ideas

Negative – it can seem quite daunting, and people worry they have to make a choice about whether they 'do' ITIL V3 or not.

Overall, I think the impact over the last year, and the build-up prior to publication (which seemed to go on for a long time), has been extremely positive. People are generally very aware of ITIL V3, and are curious about whether, or how, it can help them. Unfortunately, many people just don't know where to start.

Myths:

- You have to dispose of everything you've done to date
- You have to make a positive decision on whether you are 'doing' V2 or V3



These are complete RUBBISH, but many people assume they are true. Let's get it clear – you can keep everything you've got already, ITIL V3 gives you some best practice guidance which can help you to improve or build upon what you have already. It doesn't have to be a replacement, more of an evolution and maturity improvement opportunity.

You don't have to adopt the whole of ITIL at the same time. Some parts will be more relevant and appropriate to focus on at different stages in the maturity of your organization. You might want to start doing some aspects of a particular area, developing it further in stages to suit your unique demands and pressures. Vision and strategy is important to make sure you future-proof what you do so you don't have to rework things later – for example, understanding how you will want to model your services in future will influence what configuration data you collect when you are starting to try to get control over your service assets and configuration items – it also makes it easier to achieve because it reduces the required workload for increased benefits. There are lots of examples and tips I can give you in this category across all ITIL disciplines, but that's a whole other set of articles.

Things I really like:

- Business Service Management (BSM) – I've always been a passionate advocate of this philosophy, and it's great to see that ITIL supports and references this. Anything that can help move us to a position where our activity is understood in a business context, and is seen to be adding business value, is a good thing. Technology is an integral part of the business, not just a supplier to it.
- Service Portfolio – encouraging people to look at their services as a single portfolio is essential, in my view. It helps to drive increased economies of scale, improved efficiency and effectiveness. One of my most common frustrations is people operating in relative silos, when the reality is that it is all interrelated.
- Service Strategy – this whole book provides some really good insights and approaches for those given the accountability of looking at the big picture.
- Service Design – the clarity provided to bring many existing best practices together and present them in a useable way is excellent. Understanding the service performance requirements at the beginning of a project is critical, and was often previously ignored in favour of pure functional requirements. This caused many supposedly successful projects to deliver services that never performed well in live operation.
- Service Transition – the book really helps bridge the gap between Service Operations staff, architects/designers, developers and other project resources
- Service Operations – creating separate Event Management and Request Fulfillment processes is something I've been proposing for years. Many organizations struggled with working out where Incident Management should begin, how you deal with service requests – are they incidents or changes?
- Continual Service Improvement – we need a way of increasing the proactive activity rather than being purely reactive – prevention is better than cure! The straightforward approach in this book helps to move us towards a more balanced view.

Things I don't like so much:

- Some of the language is still a little academic in style, can sound a bit too much like a PhD thesis making it off-putting or inaccessible to some.
- Service Strategy – yes, I know I said I liked it, but there is a risk of it being purely academic rather than being used to support and direct the other disciplines. This is more about how people choose to use it rather than the quality of the book.
- There is still slightly too much focus on providing systems and infrastructure to support the rest of the business in executing their business processes. Increasingly, this is only part of the picture as businesses become even more dependent on technology. Trends such as increasing self-service, where the end customer is directly interacting with the business process through technology, means we should probably become accountable for the success of the business process and the



transactions rather than just making sure systems and infrastructure is available. Within industries where the technology is the actual end product or service of the organization (for example Telecoms), this dated view makes ITIL struggle to appear relevant.

Things I'm looking forward to

Here are a couple of examples of things I'd love to see in the next evolution (V4?) or the supplemental guidance publications for V3.

- Addressing the fact that the word 'service' is probably the most misunderstood and inconsistent term in Service Management – try asking 10 people in your organization what a service is, or what your services are, and see if you get more than one interpretation.
- Expanding on the excellent start made in the Service Transition area to more closely align Programme & Project Management so that they are fully integrated and always seen in the context of the services or capabilities being impacted – projects are just a delivery mechanism for change!
- Changing terminology. Maybe it is time to start the discussion again about removing the term 'IT' as I'm convinced that Service Management best practice can and should be applied to a much wider scope. I do a lot of work in the Telecoms and Communications sector, where the constant use of the term 'IT' puts people off. After all, **Information Technology Infrastructure Library** doesn't really explain the core essence of service management these days.

Should I read it?

Taking in to account my comments about not encouraging people to read the whole thing, I often give my audience some tips on which bits will help them most. I was presenting on Service Asset & Configuration Management recently, and I showed a couple of diagrams and talked through some concepts to make it more achievable, and I suggested the audience had a look at a certain part of the Service Transition book, but not the whole thing. With limited time, and increasing pressures on everyone these days, I felt that saving them the headache of trying to digest the complete body of knowledge was the kindest and most useful thing to do.

Who should read what?

- Everyone engaged in Service Management, and I mean everyone in a technology function, should have an overview of the philosophic approach to the service lifecycle. This doesn't mean they should read all the books, just have enough understanding that services go through the lifecycle from initial idea or requirement, through design & build, into live operation with continual improvement and ultimately retirement. The introduction book is recommended for this purpose, I suggest also considering the foundation course/exam or maybe a simulation session – a really good way to make it real.
- People should be able to understand their role, responsibilities and accountabilities in the context of the lifecycle of the services in the portfolio. For specific disciplines, there is lots of material in the V3 books which will help to do this – even if it is just for general understanding and appreciation.
- Someone in your organization, or your trusted strategic partner/consultant, should have read and understood all of the ITIL V3 material. However, they also need the practical experience, and battle scars, to be able to adapt it to suit your business and customers.
- I recommend Process Owners and the Managers responsible for operating the processes should read the relevant sections of the core books, but they also have to fully appreciate how their processes rely on other processes or are a critical dependency for others – no more silo thinking or working!

Closing Summary

On balance, ITIL V3 has had a positive impact so far, and I think it will help all of us in some way or another to increase our value to the business and our customers.



Use appropriate expertise, experience and skills

It is unreasonable to expect anyone to be successful purely by reading the ITIL V3 material. The scope of service management is now massive and increasingly business critical; therefore you need to use the 'horses for courses' approach, with appropriately skilled and experienced people specializing in different aspects. Someone does need to own the enterprise-wide view and architecture of how the whole thing fits together, providing the framework for other specialists to operate within. The integrity of the framework must be maintained, making it balanced, stopping one area breaking another.

A little bit of knowledge.....

... is a dangerous thing! Sometimes you do have to stop the debate and challenge in order to actually 'do' rather than just 'talk'. In some organization where I've seen people turning up to meetings carrying one or more of the ITIL V3 books, this has mixed blessings. I think it is excellent that people are trying to apply the best practice provided, and I am fully supportive of the people who've taken their time to work through it. However, I've seen some examples where this makes the debate about how to 'adopt and adapt' go on far longer than it should, and sometimes destroy value and benefits.

At some point, discussion and debate must be turned in to a well-informed management decision, changing it from theory in to practical operable reality. No, the discussion doesn't have to end, but a firm baseline must be established in order to move into the continual improvement stage. Governance of this process, clear accountability and responsibilities, controlled and efficient decision making, are all essential to this working well for your organization rather than being an expensive and resource hungry overhead.

Be clear about how to gather and input improvement opportunities, how the discussion and decision making will be conducted. Do this in a way where you encourage people to strive for improvement, but not at the expense of their other responsibilities – it must be a part of what they do, fully embedded into their roles, but not taking over to the extent where it negatively impacts the delivery of services to customers.

Contribute to the continual improvement of ITIL itself

- We are a community, and can help each other. I am passionate about sharing experience, positive and negative, and believe we should consider it a professional responsibility to add to our collective knowledge for the benefit of others. As my Dad says "you only get out what is put in". It's not fair if you only take out all the time, although there are times when you will need to take out more than you put in – that's a lifecycle in itself.

What a wonderful job the V3 authoring team did. It's not perfect, but then nothing ever is – let's work together to continually improve.



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