ITIL V3 - Adding Value

Introduction

Despite only being launched in May 2007, ITIL version 3 has generated considerable amounts of feedback, and not a little controversy, during its early life.

For some people, ITIL version 3 is saying nothing new. For others, it is a radical revision of the original direction of ITIL. For yet others, there is the suspicion that ITIL version 3 is trying to become a very different framework from previously, and that it has in some measure "lost its way" as a useful practical framework.

This document has been written following a presentation by Kevin Sullivan to the British Computer Society North London branch, and built on conversations with knowledgeable practitioners and theorists of ITIL over the many months since ITIL V3 was launched.

The opinions mentioned herein are my own, but I believe that they accurately reflect the different strands of opinion regarding ITIL version 3.

From Technology to Process to Value

It is helpful first of all to consider how ITIL came about in the 1980s and what it was trying to achieve.

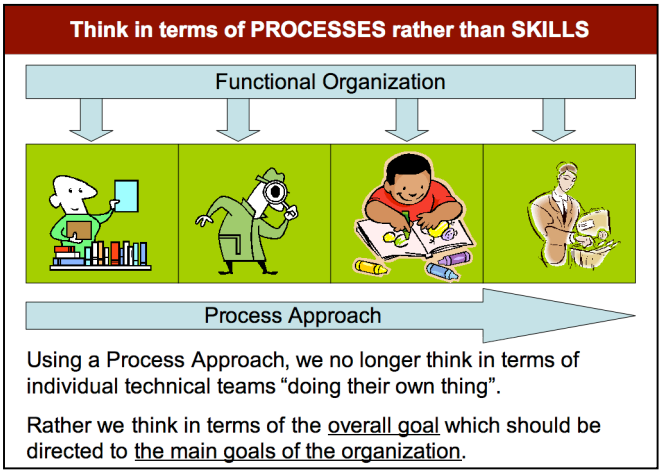
The "best practices" which ITIL introduced were based around a process-model based view of controlling and managing operations.

Without such a model, there is a tendency for IT Production departments to exist in technology "silos" consisting of System Admins, DBAs, Network engineers etc., all performing their own technical tasks without any overall view of what they are contributing to.

ITIL version 2 concepts led to the "system view" or "process approach" to IT Production

This viewed the organisation not as a set of technical functional teams, but rather as executing a set of processes which were facilitated by the organisation. This is illustrated by the diagram opposite ([i]).

The goal of these processes was two-fold – to enable a set of IT services to the business and to support their ongoing evolution.



Hence, ITIL introduced of the concepts of "Service Delivery" and "Service Support", collectively known a "Service Management". This was formalised in the various Standards accreditations such as BS 15000 and ISO 20000.

<u>ITIL version 2 attempts to re-focus the IT organisation from a "Technology silo" alignment to a Process alignment.</u>

However, the concern which has been expressed with ITIL version 2 is that IT Production organisations began to ensure that they had "tick-boxed" the different processes, to ensure "compliance" ([ii]) but did not address the reasons for having a process view in the first place.

The key reason for an IT Production organisation to exist is to focus on adding value to the business by facilitating, enabling, or supporting, the business processes.

The concern which was expressed prior to ITIL version 3 was that organisations were concentrating on getting processes implemented, and were in danger of creating "process silos" which would not necessarily be aligned with the overall business requirements.

ITIL version 3 attempts to re-focus the IT organisation from a "Process silo" alignment to a Value-add alignment.

The ITIL V3 perspective

The ITIL V3 books contain broadly the same processes as ITIL version 2, but their structure is different.

Instead of being a series of manuals on how to introduce processes to an organisation, the emphasis is "value-add", where processes are seen as a means to this end.

Hence, ITIL V3 is not as helpful a "process textbook" source as V2 was. Whereas in V2 a particular process (such as Release Management) was clearly described in just one chapter, in V3 this information is scattered throughout the five books.

The reason for this is that ITIL V3 takes a "life-cycle" view of the role of IT. Under this view, "Services" are designed, created, transitioned into live, and then operationally supported. They may then be subject to removal at the end of their life-cycle. This is reflected in the names of the key four books which describe phases of the life cycle:

Service Strategy => Service Design => Service Transition => Service Operation

The emphasis in ITIL V3 is on creating appropriate processes to enable Services to pass through this life-cycle.

In addition, the fifth book on ITIL **Continual Service Improvement** serves to emphasise that there should be a continuous re-assessment of the processes and activities of the IT organisation.

Just as V2 attempted to instil a cultural change in the organisation, and emphasise Process over Technology, so V3 attempts to encourage Value over Process.

An example of this is where the concepts of "Release" and "Change" have been treated under the common heading of "Transition Management". It could be argued that the distinction between "Release" and "Change" were fairly artificial in some respects, but the emphasis on "Transition Management" is the bringing of services into IT support – the value-add.

It could be argued that the V3 "mission" is attempting to bring about an even more radical cultural change than that of V2. This could explain why some people have argued that the target audience for V3 appears to be consultants dealing at CIO / CEO level, rather than at Operations / Infrastructure Manager level.

ITIL had always acknowledged other process improvement frameworks and methodologies such as COBIT and Six-Sigma. In V3, the references to these have increased. ITIL is therefore moving away from being a framework in its own right. Instead, it is trying to emphasise an approach to IT. The desire of V3 is to emphasise Value, rather than processes or process improvement as ends in themselves.

Where this leaves the Standards such as BS 15000 and ISO 20000 is an interesting question. These standards require organisations to answer the "tick box" questions such as "do you

have an effective release management process?" This process-focused question is still valid, but with ITIL V3, the questions are more about whether services are being released into Production in an efficient value-added way. Whether this will result in a new set of Standards will be something that time will tell.

Practical Implementation Issues

In speaking to other consultants and practitioners about ITIL V3, the general consensus has been not to rush implementation of ITIL V3.

The message of ITIL V3 is a cultural one. It is addressed to the CIO, not the Operations Manager, and is concerned with how to culturally align the IT organisation with the Business. This requires an executive-level initiative, with huge implications for the way the IT organisation works.

The real message of ITIL V3 can only be embraced by an organisation which is culturally mature, at least to the extent that it has a "process-aligned" rather than "technology aligned" culture.

For many IT production organisations, it will be important to have a process view of their activity first, before trying to take the radical step of being business-aligned. This means ensuring that the ITIL V2 cultural changes are "embedded" to the IT production organisation first.

Conclusions

ITIL V3 builds on ITIL V2, and tries to focus the IT effort into business-aligned activities, rather than just putting in the "correct process".

However, this may be too strong a message for many organisations who are still struggling to justify the effort being put into introducing V2 processes. For such organisations, a key justification is that V2 is creating the process building blocks that can enable IT to better support the business in future.

About the Author:

Dennis Adams is an Associate Member of the Chartered Quality Institute and MBCS CITP and "ELITE" member of the British Computer Society.

He is a founder and managing director of Dennis Adams Associates Limited, which was created to deliver a consultancy service to managers of IT Production Systems.

Dennis Adams Associates web site is **http://www.dennisadams.co.uk**

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[i] This diagram is taken from a presentation by Dennis Adams to the UK Oracle Users Group in November 2006, entitled "Can ITIL really help me? A beginner's practical guide". The full presentation is available on the Dennis Adams Associates website.

[ii] ITIL is, by its very nature, non-prescriptive. So, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as "compliance" to ITIL processes. However, many organisations strove to ensure that all of the processes described in ITIL were in formally place. In that sense, they could claim ITIL "compliance". Also, standards definitions such as BS 15000 / ISO 20000 led to the view that there was a level of compliance which could be achieved.