

## ITIL Should Not be Hard

By Braun Tacon

[BraunsBlog.Com](http://BraunsBlog.Com)

A Position Paper based upon experiences, wins (and setbacks), and some common sense

### **Abstract**

*Why is it that the transition to an ITIL based Service Delivery model is considered difficult? Or more accurately why does it sometimes take a long time for ITIL projects to gain the required acceptance and maturity in order to deliver Business Value and ROI?*

*ITIL should not be hard. If you do IT you are already applying ITIL concepts whether you know it or not. ITIL is just a Framework based upon a Strategy to refine and optimize all aspects of IT Service Delivery, also know as ITSM or IT Service Management. The real question is not, "Why is implementing ITIL hard?", but rather the real question is, "How well are you implementing ITIL"?*

### **Analysis and Recommendations**

What are some possible pitfalls in an ITIL implementation? What factors can influence an ITIL implementation both negatively and positively? How do you increase your chance of having fewer negative and more positive outcomes?

The contributors can be many, but I think they can be distilled to a small set of topics:

- Scope (Bigger than a bread box? Who, what, when? Days, weeks, years?)
- Requirements (When you order pizza you ask for everything, but definitely NO anchovies!)
- Expectations (This is really a statement of warranty and penalties)
- Business Value (Identify Customer(s) and their needs, your needs and your costs, and at what quality?)
- Executive buy in (Executive support including making ITIL a Strategic Priority)
- Cultural Acceptance (Broad adoption, strong support, and a focus on continual improvement)

**Scope** – From my perspective ITIL implementation failures often occur due to improper scoping, and more often it is because the chosen scope is simply too large. Sometimes it is said, "...we need to implement ITIL". Just what exactly does that mean? Is implementing ITIL adopting all elements of the Service Management Lifecycle from Service Strategy to Continual Service Improvement? Addressing all Functions in parallel? That's a pretty big elephant to try to eat in one bite; better to swallow it in chunks.

If you were painting a complex picture, in all probability you would not attempt to paint it in broad strokes. Instead you would draw an outline first and then fill in sections such as the face and hands. You might also work on only one section at a time so as to achieve a high level of effectiveness and to conserve your tools and paints. I think the same is true when trying to implement ITIL. You probably don't want to take on too much at once. Instead draw your outline first and clearly define your scope, goals, and expected benefits. After that you can begin to fill in the details and address and refine the Processes that will bring you the most return for your investment of time and resources. Choose whatever Processes will ease the most pain at your organization (many start with Incident, Problem, Change), and be sure not to overlook or underestimate the Value and ROI of Knowledge Management. Once you have clearly defined your Scope you can then begin to collect

**Requirements.**

**Requirements** – Understanding and addressing Requirements is a critical step if you wish to have a successful ITIL implementation. Yet Requirements are often not well understood or defined. Sometimes they are simply left to the last minute. Frequently the goal is to “...implement ITIL” as opposed to “...implement ITIL best practices to address a gap in our Incident Management Service in order to reduce the number of ticket misroutes and to increase our overall First Call Resolution.”

When gathering Requirements consider all aspects: the business (both IT and non – IT), the urgency, the costs, any contractual constraints, and the timelines. Requirements should fit into a matrix that has clear lines of connection and demarcation, very much like a RACI. In fact, you might find a RACI a good tool to demonstrate these relationships in a way that is easy to see and understand. You should also develop a business version, but be sure that it speaks to relevant business goals, not IT jargon. Only after collecting and understanding all customer and supplier Requirements can you then begin to set realistic **Expectations**.

**Expectations** – Just as important as understanding and addressing Requirements is, it is even more important to set transparent, understandable, and agreed to Expectations with each and every affected party. Expectations are often misunderstood or miss-communicated. Failure to agree to and set clear Expectations is a sure way to increase your level of Customer dissatisfaction. The most common reason for this failure is the absence of a common understanding of terms and definitions and / or a failure to agree to those terms and definitions and their intended outcomes. ITIL goes a long way to addressing that with the Glossary but that Glossary needs to be translated into terms the business community can understand and that are relevant to their goals.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) is intended to provide that translation of IT Services for the business. When defining SLA include clearly stated business goals, e.g., “...deliver web-hosting Services to e-commerce in such a way as they are guaranteed the highest level of Service Delivery and Business Continuity that is available for cost x. Additionally provide redundancy services that will insure Service Delivery and Business Continuity in the event of a system failure or a catastrophe.” Then tie those business goals back to ITIL specific Services, e.g., “...provide Incident Management Services via the Service Desk with a guaranteed response time of x hours for x priority Incidents. Implement Event Monitoring to Alert Resolvers of specific Service Failures, to trigger automatic Failover to Redundancy Systems when required, and to provide for proactive Problem Management”.

These are just a few suggestions on how to set agreed to Expectations. You can always do more but by doing these few things you will see a measurable increase in Customer Satisfaction and an equally measurable decrease in Incidents, Problems, and Disputes. Scope, Requirements, and Expectations all help to define the **Business Value**.

**Business Value** – If you work for a company, then you are part of a business. Even IT is a business. Conversely, any Customer who does business with your company is also an integral part of your business. They are stakeholders, shareholders, and supporters. Real Business Value helps insure that they remain that way.

All businesses function by seeking and delivering Value. It can also be said that, "...all Value is in the eye of the beholder". Each business function must determine what its customers' want, who are the suppliers, what it needs to deliver, how to deliver it, and at what cost? All of this must also be done for a minimum expenditure of time, money and resources, with no decrease in quality. In fact the most successful Business Value models focus on driving performance up while driving costs down. A good example of that in practice is the Data Storage Industry. Lean calls this [Value Stream Mapping](#)

Business Value is different for each Customer and business function, but the best Business Value occurs when all parties have a synergistic and mutually beneficial partnership. In summary, “...your success is my success.” The better you can demonstrate the Business Value, the easier it is to get **Executive buy-in**.

**Executive buy-in** – It is true that in business, “...those that hold the purse strings get to choose the symphony”. Those purse strings include time, money, resources, and most importantly commitment. You can’t have the former without the latter. That is why Executive buy-in is key.

To create that buy-in requires a driver that is explained by a story. That driver may be a Customer with a want or need. It may be a Regulatory Agency mandating a Standard or Control. It could also come about as part of overall operational Requirements, or expansion or improvement efforts. Once the drivers are known and there is a case for taking action, you begin to craft your story. Your story should clearly communicate the risks of avoidance and the benefits of adoption. Keep it short, to the point, factual and without drama. Include in your story the must haves, should haves, and want / nice to haves. Stand firm for the must haves and be willing to compromise on the rest. If you can back up your position with facts and logic then you can be confident in your position.

Without Executive buy-in an effort as significant as an ITIL implementation becomes very difficult if not impossible to achieve. Simply “doing the right thing” might be the right choice for exceptions or emergency situations but it is no way to run a business or manage a project. When starting down the ITIL journey obtaining Executive buy-in is a key first step. Executive buy-in helps drive **Cultural Acceptance**.

**Cultural Acceptance** – Cultural Acceptance is not an end state. It is not a finish line that you cross and walk away from. The race is never over. Cultural Acceptance is constantly in flux. It is based upon the current Value and quality Requirements of the Customer versus the Value and quality that is delivered by the Suppliers. Cultural Acceptance is neither guaranteed nor perpetual. You must work hard for Cultural Acceptance, and work even harder to sustain it.

Cultural Acceptance can be best described as doing something not because we have to, but rather because we want to and because we see it as a Value. A good analogy for this is the widespread adoption of Electronics Funds Transfer (EFT) that has occurred over the past decade for the delivery of payroll. EFT was long challenged to garner widespread Cultural Acceptance, but now it is the norm and it would be seen as a Value loss if it were removed. At the same time, consider that if EFT systems were to begin to routinely fail and payroll was not delivered, the Cultural Acceptance of EFT as a Value would quickly diminish or disappear.

I believe the best way to attain and sustain Cultural Acceptance is to: demonstrate the Value, show the outcomes (both good and bad), seek feedback often, and most importantly continuously work to drive improvements in both innovation and quality.

**Summation:** The approach and recommendations above are not meant to be hard and fast nor should they be considered the pinnacle of ITIL process improvement. They are just a few observations based upon the sum of my experiences and learning’s.

I hope you received Value for your time spent reading this position and I would appreciate any feedback you may have.

Braun Tacon  
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