

Is ITIL Right For the Medium Enterprises?

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Is ITIL Right For the Medium Enterprises?

Introduction

Is ITIL right for the mid-market? The answer is an unqualified yes. In fact, one can argue that the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) is the strategic “force multiplier” that the mid-market needs to compete effectively against larger competitors. ITIL is the most popularly implemented best practice available today and includes an IT management framework emphasizing management from the perspectives of both the business and IT service consumers.

Many view ITIL as a large and complex framework – and it is. However, one of the most important concepts expressed in ITIL is that companies don’t need to adopt everything in ITIL, and there is no specific order of implementation or set of required processes. The processes described by ITIL are representative of all the activities that successful companies have evolved over many years. ITIL covers every aspect of IT management – from application development to security to engineering. It is imperative that businesses choose just those elements of ITIL that are relevant to their particular situations.

Currently, the most commonly utilized edition of ITIL is Version 2, which was released in 2001 and consists of 2 publications: Service Support and Service Delivery. One of ITIL’s foundational principles is that best practices can and should be used for business benefit. Building on this philosophy, Version 3 of ITIL was recently released (May 2007) to adopt a more lifecycle-oriented approach to service management. Rather than aligning business and IT, V3 views service management and business strategy as an integrated entity. V3 does not conflict with V2 so existing and ongoing investments based on V2 principles will not lose value as V3 gains widespread use. ITIL V3 also now organizes by lifecycle rather than IT management domain and consists of 5 books: Service Strategy, Service Design, Service Transition, Service Operation, and Continual Service Improvement.

Success with ITIL framework comes from analyzing the people, process and products in existing IT operations and business environments, and then choosing the minimum set of process descriptions from ITIL. This should not be confused with choosing less ITIL processes than required, however. ITIL is very clear about how to align with businesses to ensure IT does the right

things in the right way. ITIL is an agnostic tool, but only the smallest of IT organizations can make use of ITIL ideas and processes without implementing at least some automated tools.

Is ITIL Appropriate for Mid-Sized Enterprises?

ITIL is, in fact, more useful to mid-sized businesses because they are more resource constrained than larger organizations. That is, smaller companies cannot afford to “throw people” at issues. Smaller companies have to work smarter, not harder. This is the very definition of IT Service Management (ITSM) as described by ITIL.

The Fortune 100,000 (businesses with greater than 100 employees but earning less than the top 1000 revenue makers) as a group represents a vast number of similarly sized companies. Members of the F100K also face very similar competitive and business marketplaces. It should come as no surprise then that the IS and IT organizations within these companies are also similar. In fact, F100K IT organizations face the same challenges, and in some areas more significant challenges, than their Fortune 100 or Fortune 1000 counterparts.

For mid-market Enterprises, ITIL represents what the military calls a “force multiplier.” In other words, correctly applying specific ITIL techniques can make the IT organization more effective and efficient by enhancing the productivity of every IT worker. It also stabilizes the infrastructure, and eliminates recurring problems.

To the medium enterprise, ITIL means improved efficiency and effectiveness, as can be seen through:

- Improved change and release management, which translates into fewer self-inflicted outages
- Creation of a knowledgebase that diminishes reliance on specific individuals and allows the organization to scale
- Less interruptions from users calling directly into IT for service and support by having a centralized Service Desk
- More efficient utilization of subject matter experts due to less interruption and the use of Incident Management to route tickets to the appropriate resource and watch over tickets to ensure they do not “age”

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- Better control over IT asset investments through Configuration Management
- Improvements in infrastructure stability through Problem Management that documents the root-cause of IT incidents, works with Change Management to discover problems, and leverages Configuration Management to maximize performance.

Getting Started

IT managers in medium sized companies should begin their ITIL journey by considering which of two main areas are most troublesome: recurring systems failures and reactionary “firefighting;” or an inability to make hardware and/or software changes to the infrastructure without “breaking something else.”

From an ITIL perspective, stability is improved through the operational support and restore processes of Incident Management, Problem Management and the Service Desk Function.

Organizational capabilities are addressed with the operational release and control processes of Change, Release and Configuration Management.

Tailoring ITIL Methodologies for Mid-Sized Businesses

In most mid-sized IT organizations, the parts of ITIL that will be most useful are in the Service Support area. Service Support includes those activities required to install and support infrastructure. As illustrated in Figure 1, ITIL processes include Incident Management, Problem Management, Change Management, Configuration Management, Release Management, and the Service Desk function.

Many mid-sized IT organizations are swamped with trouble tickets and service requests. Since most are also resource constrained, these two concerns are near the top of the list in ITIL interest. ITIL Incident and Problem Management in combination with the Service Desk and systems management tools offer a proven solution. The goal of these processes is to achieve control over the reactive day-to-day processes within IT. By identifying and standardizing how IT staff responds to common requests, more senior IT staff are able to focus on higher value activities without interruption. This al-

lows the people most likely to be able to fix underlying problems to be dedicated to resolving them. Since most calls into the IT organization result from a common set of underlying problems, finding the root cause and eliminating them is critical. Highly technical resources helping users resolve trivial problems simply allow these underlying problems to persist and fester, generating even more calls into IT.

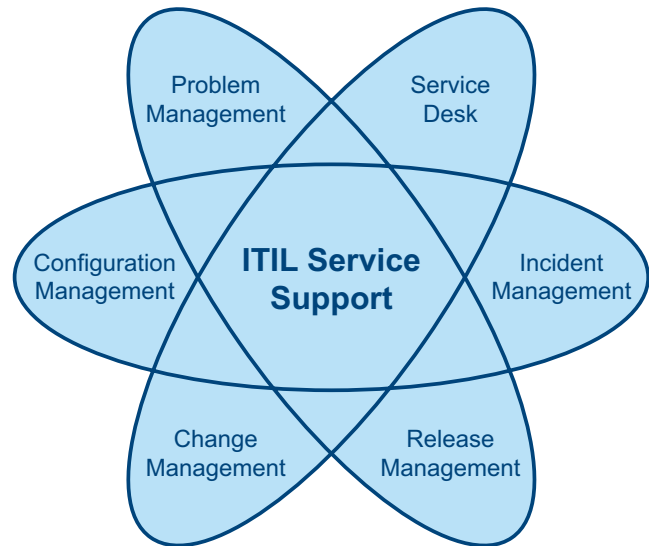


Figure 1: Components of ITIL Service Support

Implementing an ITIL solution in combination with a good systems management tool captures organizational knowledge, making the least skilled worker at the help or Service Desk able to function on a level with the most skilled. This is simply not possible without strong process control and some form of tool. As more senior technical resources find and eliminate problems from the infrastructure, there are fewer incidents because users experience fewer issues, visibly improving IT service quality.

Clearly, using an ITIL driven tool in the right way can have a dramatically positive impact on service quality, as well as on the overall performance of the workplace. The critical consideration is in determining how best to customize an ITIL process solution for the unique requirements particular to medium businesses. One method of customizing for the mid-market is to combine a set of processes into centralized functions. For example, smaller companies would do well to implement the ITIL recommendation of combining the

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Configuration, Change and Release management processes into a single activity – a “CCR” function. On the other hand, some processes should never be combined. For example, it is tempting for a small business to think that Incident and Problem management can be combined. However, this seldom works and can ultimately lead to failed initiatives.

ITIL has been proven time and time again to deliver real benefits for those organizations that understand its true purpose and nature. The other significant contributor to success is to approach ITIL adoption as a formal IT project.

Approach to Implementation

Mid-sized companies can seldom dedicate resources to ITSM establishment beyond basic organizational issues. This makes choosing which parts of ITIL to implement very important. There is no “cook book” within ITIL regarding process adoption, and ITIL implementation is thus different for every organization. While there is no “magic bullet,” there is a well-defined and tested process for choosing the appropriate parts of ITIL for a particular organization. This process is called a service improvement plan, or SIP. The SIP is essentially a project plan and consists of four phases: initiation, planning, execution, and closure.

Whether one chooses to hire a consulting firm to carry out the steps, or decides to do it themselves, the activities are identical:

- Initiation starts the project. This step focuses on the “why” and “what” of the project, setting expectations in establishing the scope of the SIP. This is where management commitment is obtained and the scope of the project is beginning to be understood.
- Planning is where detail is assigned to the activities and estimates are made of the time costs and human resources required. This is where it is determined who is going to do what and when. During this step, a work breakdown structure (WBS) is prepared to document the existing manual work being performed. Also during this phase, any new tools required for project completion will be identified.

- Execution is the period during which the plan is carried out. Critical during the execution phase is monitoring to ensure that the results are as expected. During execution, new processes are implemented as well as any tools that may have been identified during the planning phase.
- Closure is an often-overlooked phase of IT projects, but it is critical to success. This is where formal acceptance is achieved, validating the justification and support for the project. Closure is also where many important lessons for the next SIP can be learned, knowing there will be a next SIP because the process of service improvement never ends.



Figure 2: Phases in an ITIL Service Implementation Plan (SIP)

An effective plan for implementing ITIL is to understand the consumers of the work that is being improved. Only once it is understood what the user or customer really needs, can consideration be made about how to fulfill that requirement. Minimum process and workflow requirements need to be established, and existing (usually manual) processes need to be standardized and documented. As workflow documentation accumulates, patterns emerge that will show where the current system is failing.

Anyone that is familiar with ITIL knows that it contains much more descriptive guidance than is covered here. However, the basic elements of the SIP remain the same regardless of the parts of ITIL that are chosen. These small changes accumulate until eventually IT effectiveness improves to the point of visible reductions in “firefighting” and an increase in reliability in the implementation of changes. The “free time” achieved from these process activities may then be utilized to solve deeper technical issues and proactively improve the IT infrastructure.

Of course, using a tool makes these tasks much easier. Combining selectively applied ITIL process with an appliance or software tool specifically designed to accommodate such activities often results in dramatic “quick wins.” Through these quick wins, IT demonstrates im-

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improvements to business systems that reduces downtime and provides higher quality service and support. Another benefit is an improvement in IT working conditions that can lead to reduced staff turnover.

A Medium Enterprise Buying Guide for Implementing ITIL

The Value of Commercial Systems Management Solutions to ITIL Management

Understanding best practice approaches like ITIL is only half the battle to actually achieving success with those established processes. How those processes are actually implemented in an IT infrastructure is at least as critical. An inappropriate or incomplete deployment can be counter-productive to effective IT management. This is particularly true for mid-sized businesses that lack the extensive tools, personnel and resources to implement new practices in IT environments that are increasing in both complexity and business utilization.

Centralized, automated, enterprise-wide systems management tools that are ITIL focused simplify the process of collecting detailed infrastructure data, analyzing the data for potential problems, reporting issues to critical personnel and facilitating true root cause analysis for problem prevention and remediation – and they do so in a manner consistent with the best practices outlined in ITIL. For medium enterprise IT managers intent on ITIL deployment, the question is not whether to purchase tools to assist in the process, but which tools to purchase.

Determining the Most Important Features

All businesses are challenged to ensure value in their IT investments, and certainly medium enterprises need to be particularly focused on ensuring they get the most “bang for their buck” in IT purchases. The key to effectively balancing cost with functionality is having an understating of what features best achieve ITIL implementation goals outlined in an SIP.

Mid-sized businesses needing to end the break/fix cycle of reactive “firefighting” should look for solutions that include both granular configuration data collection and change detection functionality that enables identification of problems before they occur. Additionally, these fea-

tures can facilitate root cause analysis of recurring problems to determine the actual cause. By enabling proactive problem prevention, IT staffs are freed up to improve IT conditions so they will achieve business requirements and meet Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

High availability environments that find it difficult to make changes to their infrastructure due to the impacts it could have on the business need to look for solutions that minimize complexity and intrusiveness on the infrastructure. Also, mid-sized businesses with limited staff will want a solution that is simple to use to ease the necessity for training, decrease knowledge loss due to attrition, and maximize the performance of even the least skilled worker.

Choosing a Solution that Meets the Business Model

Once ITIL implementation goals have been determined, indicating the features necessary in a systems management solution for successful implementation, a look at the business model should also be considered to ensure long-term viability of the product. For instance, mid-sized businesses typically combine IT support responsibilities into a single, or only a few, support team(s). These businesses will want to invest in a single, centralized package that can support all IT requirements, to prevent “swivel-chair administration” that occurs when multiple disparate tools are employed.

Certainly, cost must be considered here, but, as previously mentioned, it needs to be balanced with the expected return on investment from the tool. Large expensive solutions may include all the tools necessary to achieve ITIL success, but if a significant portion of the included tools is not utilized or too complicated to deploy, the business is not receiving the best value for its expenditure. Conversely, “point products,” or those designed for only a few specific purposes, will likely not scale to grow with the business. The old adage of “buy what can be afforded, but no more than is needed” is an appropriate rule to keep in mind. Figure 3 below provides a general guide for determining a solution that will effectively meet IT business needs for achieving ITIL.

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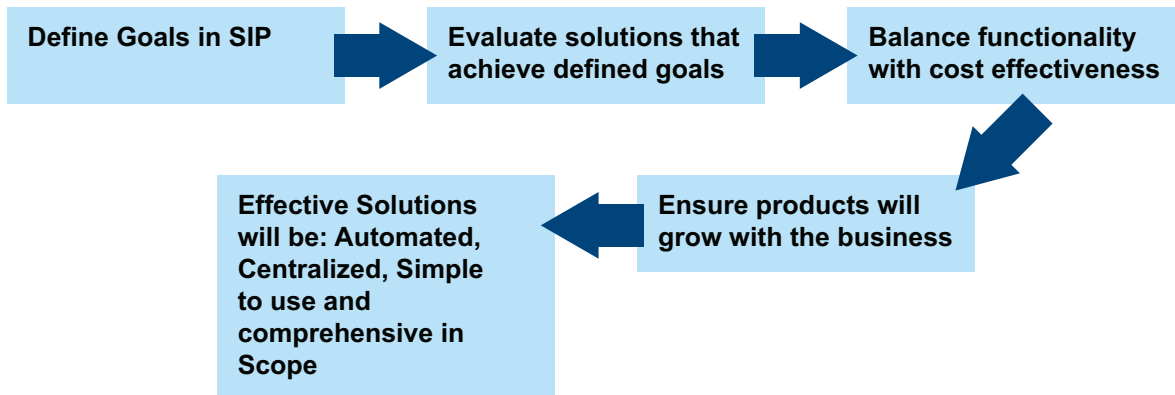


Figure 3: Considerations in choosing tools to assist in ITIL Implementation

How KBOX from KACE supports ITIL Implementations

Having designed the KBOX appliance to directly support the needs of the medium enterprise community, KACE has provided much of the functionality mid-sized businesses will find useful in supporting ITIL implementations. Fulfilling the common requirements outlined above for mid-sized businesses, KBOX from KACE provides a centralized enterprise-wide systems management solution that automates the collection of data, the identification of problems, and the reporting of IT status and incidents.

KACE offers two implementations of the KBOX. The first is the KBOX Systems Deployment Appliance which standardizes and simplifies the process of deploying operating systems and applications customized to achieve business requirements. In this way, ITIL processes can be implemented in new environments or maintained on expanding environments according to pre-defined configuration standards, assuring consistency across the infrastructure. Restoration of the environment is also facilitated by providing the ability to automatically recover to a baselined condition.

KACE also offers the KBOX Systems Management Appliance, which continues support for ITIL modeled IT management processes throughout a systems lifecycle. Hardware and software configurations are collected and stored, satisfying the requirements in ITIL Configuration Management module. Alert functionality is configurable to ensure prompt notification of changes to the environment that drift outside of pre-determined configuration standards, and the Help Desk Module

provides the ticketing submission, tracking and management system outlined in ITIL Service Desk function. Patch management and software deployment simplifies and accelerates ITIL Change, Configuration and Release Management process by automating implementation based on pre-defined configurations. Finally, reporting functionality provides the validation of success necessary to achieve closure on each implemented SIP.

Mid-sized businesses will be attracted to this solution because of the balance of broad functionality and cost-effectiveness. KBOX from KACE provides the automated tools most applicable to achieve ITIL success in mid-sized businesses, and assists small, multi-function IT support groups by providing a centralized common interface for all the applicable tools. And with pricing as low as 25% of the cost of software-only systems management solutions (as determined by Enterprise Management Associates in a recent lifecycle management product evaluation), the KBOX from KACE certainly achieves affordability. With KBOX from KACE, mid-sized businesses are able to achieve ITIL compliance simply, effectively and inexpensively to establish prompt return on investment from the entire IT infrastructure.

EMA's Perspective

Primary research from Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) has indicated that 61% of all businesses that have adopted best practices have implemented ITIL. ITIL includes several advantages to justify its popularity including a widely understandable and agreed-upon terminology, a comprehensive coverage of IT service delivery and support, its maturity, and its proven effectiveness, and EMA recommends most busi-

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nesses review and implement the best practices associated with ITIL as a way to streamline their IT support and to increase their profitability.

Vendors providing ITIL oriented solutions should be encouraged by growth in this market and should specifically consider development to meet the needs of medium enterprises. Doing this will involve balancing cost and functionality to maximize the value of the products to address ITIL processes. A note of caution, however, for mid-sized businesses seeking value-based solutions – cost should not be the sole consideration. Allowances need to be made for the potential of business growth, and a solution should be chosen that not only satisfies the needs of today, but also the potential needs of tomorrow.

If ITIL is the road to IT management success, then automated systems management solutions are the vehicles that transport businesses on it. Mid-sized enterprises have just as great a need to travel on this highway to success as large enterprises, and solutions, like KBOX from KACE, will enable a journey towards operational effectiveness, profitability and gaining control over the IT infrastructure.

About KACE

KACE is the leading systems management appliance company. The award winning KBOX family of appliances delivers easy-to-use, comprehensive systems management capabilities. KACE customers usually install in one day at one third the cost of software alternatives. KACE is headquartered in Mountain View, California. To learn more about KACE and its product offerings, please visit <http://www.kace.com> or call 1-877-MGMT-DONE.

About Enterprise Management Associates, Inc.

Enterprise Management Associates is an advisory and research firm providing market insight to solution providers and technology guidance to Fortune 1000 companies. The EMA team is composed of industry respected analysts who deliver strategic awareness about computing and communications infrastructure. Coupling this team of experts with an ever-expanding knowledge repository gives EMA clients an unparalleled advantage against their competition. The firm has published hundreds of articles and books on technology management topics and is frequently requested to share their observations at management forums worldwide.

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Corporate Headquarters:

5777 Central Avenue, Suite 105

Boulder, CO 80301

Phone: +1 303.543.9500

Fax: +1 303.543.7687

www.enterprisemanagement.com

