

Change Can Be a Good Thing - Transitioning from ITIL v2 to v3

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A year ago, the ITIL community was collectively starting to breathe again after the long wait for the publication of ITIL Version 3. The word before publication had been that V3 was an incremental update to V2, so we were told not to worry too much.

But what an "increment" that turned out to be! While we knew that V3 would be based on a service lifecycle that was a distinct (but welcome) change from ITIL V2, what we didn't know was the extent of new material in V3. The old tried and true material was still there (appropriately updated), but two completely new aspects were included in V3, namely Service Strategy and Continual Service Improvement.

To back up for a moment, the IT Infrastructure Library, or ITIL, is a best practice framework aimed originally at IT Operations. The emphasis was on ensuring IT services would run as advertised, and any interruptions to service would be quickly resolved, permanent solutions to problems would be found, etc. Version 1 was written at the end of the 1980s, and a consolidation of the numerous books in Version 1 was done around 2000 and became Version 2. There are two main books in Version 2 (Service Support and Service Delivery) and five ancillary books, which most people are unaware of and even fewer people have read. Both versions are derived from real-world experience and have a great deal of wisdom in them.

ITIL Version 2 gained real traction from about 2001 onwards, and now is a de facto standard.

Many people felt there wasn't much "broken" in Version 2, so while an update to ITIL was welcome, we were not expecting a wholesale change. Consequently, there was a lot of whining about the necessity of the new material in Version 3.

So what has V3 really given us? After living with the five volumes of ITIL Version 3 for the last year or so, I can tell you it has delivered a lot! While we may not have thought ITIL V2 was "broken," I now believe it was. Probably the best example of how ITIL V2 was "broken" concerns the definition of a service.

ITIL implementations based upon V2 usually stalled after implementing the processes in the Service Support book. The Service Delivery book is really about Service Level Agreements and what you need to do to support them.

A huge hole exists in V2, because it never really defines what a service is in the first place. To fill this gap, customers would often have an exercise to write their own definition, which always ended up being convoluted and incomplete.

Consequently, efforts to build processes based upon a poor definition ran into problems, and the processes were ineffective.

The Service Strategy volume of ITIL V3 gives a very good definition of a service. While it looks esoteric at first glance, the definition stands up to scrutiny and provides the basis for all the work that follows on (such as the definition of Service Level Agreements). Additionally, the Service Strategy volume addresses the question of which services should be offered. This is where true business alignment (an often used, but poorly understood, expression) begins!

The Continual Service Improvement volume adds an essential element to ITIL in that it shows how to sustain the effort to implement ITIL. In fact, ITIL is more of a journey than a destination, and effort needs to be expended on a continual basis, just like the old-time, quality programs have always told us. While I believe there will be more added to CSI in the future, the current volume provides a starting point for continual improvement efforts.

ITIL Version 2 had three levels of certification, namely Foundation, Practitioner, and Service Manager. For Version 3, the certification scheme is more complicated, but can be summarized as four levels - Foundation, Intermediate, Expert, and Master. So far, V3 Foundation and V2-to-V3 Foundation bridging classes are available, and additionally, a V2-to-V3 Service Manager bridging class is in the market place (the last course has a very limited audience).

The Foundation classes are very popular. They are essentially there to provide an overview of ITIL Version 3, and do a fine job of providing that.

The syllabi for the Intermediate courses are due out mid-June, and later in the year, courses will be available. There are two distinct types of courses at the intermediate level - the Capability courses and the Lifecycle courses. Capability courses are aimed at people who are implementing or running the ITIL processes, and they are the replacement for the V2 Practitioner courses. There are four Capability courses each covering several related ITIL processes. Lifecycle courses are aimed more at managing the processes and will not delve into implementation issues as much as the Capability courses. There are five Lifecycle courses, each one covering one of the five volumes of ITIL Version 3 (Service Strategy, Service Design, Service Transition, Service Operation, and Continual Service Improvement).

If you are implementing ITIL processes, or if you have already implemented them and want to continually improve them (you should!), then one of these courses is for you.

In addition to the knowledge gained on each course, they set you on a path to get the ITIL Expert and Master designations.

In summary, ITIL Version 3 has added a great deal to our industry and set us on a path to a much fuller integration of IT into the business. ITIL Version 2, when it was published, was a guidepost we followed until we caught up with its advice. ITIL Version 3 continues that tradition with many new ideas that we at first will struggle to implement, but which we need to do for IT to be valuable to the business.

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