Chapter 13
Comparative Evaluation of ITIL-Based Process Landscapes

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ABSTRACT

The Information Technology Infrastructure Library's (ITIL) is widely used as a model for IT service processes mainly due to its general nature. A drawback of this generality is that it greatly hinders the conversion of best practices into specific implementable processes. To assess such processes for their completeness and to find and overcome possible weak-spots in the design, this work proposes an in-depth comparison with available best practice frameworks that relate to and extend the ITIL, such as the Microsoft Operations framework (MOF). The comparison and evaluation method is presented and verified exemplarily with an actual pilot-phase process implementation.

1. THE HARDSHIPS OF ASSESSING ITIL-BASED PROCESS LANDSCAPES

The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) is the framework that most IT service providers base their service process landscapes on, making it "the most widely accepted approach to IT service management (ITSM)" (OGC 2008). The release of version 3 of ITIL (V3) in May 2007 and its quite different approach to IT services over its predecessor version 2 (V2), attempts to resolve two known problems of ITIL V2:

1. ITIL V2's unspecific nature required a creative design of service processes that were not defined by ITIL, but merely based on it.
2. ITIL V2 did not present a complete view of all the processes required by ITSM, one example being the absence of a service life-cycle.

The wide adoption of ITIL V2 combined with the limited implementation of its two main service areas of Service Delivery and Service Support,

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as practiced at the majority of its users served to heighten the impact of these problems. The result is a continued presence of a large number of IT service process landscapes that represent free interpretations of the ITIL V2 service areas and have been enhanced by home-grown or need-driven activities and processes covering ITIL V2's missing or excluded service areas.

When planning to analyze this kind of process landscapes for optimization three – non-exclusive – approaches present themselves:

1. Transitioning to ITIL V3, by redesigning processes, basing improvements on the knowledge gained with the operation of the current processes and the improvements of the current ITIL over its previous version.
2. Optimizing or rebuilding the existing processes using a quality improvement method such as Six Sigma (for optimization, based on the current processes' failure to perform according to business requirements) or Design for Six Sigma (for redesign, based on the established business requirements).
3. Drawing on the knowledge of others and optimizing the established processes by introducing improvements derived from other companies' ITSM implementations.

As media coverage shows (representational see Dierlamm 2008, Anthes 2008), many implementers of ITIL V2 do not plan a transition to ITIL V3 (approach 1) in the near future, refraining for reasons such as contentment with the current implementation, the increase in the number of processes to implement, an ongoing V2 implementation, or the cost and effort necessary.

Quality improvement and control methods, such as Six Sigma (approach 2) are an established way to optimize processes, but they also require a high degree of knowledge of the method applied that often has to be introduced by costly external experts, as well as requiring the effort to implement organizational and cultural changes. In addition these methods depend strongly on the availability of metrics representing the attributes of the process in focus, preferably collected over a prolonged period of time. This disqualifies them for any analysis of processes still in their concept, design, or piloting phase or having only been introduced into operation recently. Design for Six Sigma manages to solve the absence of utilizable metrics during the concept and design phase, but promotes a greenfield approach that obsoletes any established process designs. It is questionable if companies that have introduced ITIL V2 or are in the process of doing so are willing to procure the finances and personnel efforts necessary to perform such an quality improvement project for a whole process landscape, especially when ITIL V3 is still an option or the need for change is not pressing beyond certain bearable limits.

The third approach, basing improvements on the service implementation of others, relates directly to the common "I wish I knew how the others did this"-mentality, often called upon, when faced with a problem that is known to have surfaced and been resolved elsewhere. It is also reflected in the reasons, why companies hire external consultants, which lie to a high degree with the consultant's knowledge of the industry's approach to a problem or his previous experience with a similar problem at another customer (Figure 1). Two reasons hinder the practical applicability of this approach: the high costs when hiring an experienced external consultant to analyze and improve a complete ITIL-based process landscape and the protectiveness that companies show toward their process designs, especially when they are optimized to a degree that is reflected in an actual contribution to business value.

A business' decision to follow the first or the second approach depends mainly on the willingness to employ the funds and human resources to master the necessary efforts. The assets needed for the third approach to the analysis and improvement of ITIL-based process landscapes however can be reduced when applying a comparison that