



# Using ITIL® to Drive Business Innovation

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This document discusses Information Technology challenges faced by businesses and suggests that the practical application of technology based on a foundation of collective experience can allow businesses to increase the pace of innovation.

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## Using ITIL® to drive Business Innovation

While Information Technology has become increasingly essential to continuing business operations, IT environments have simultaneously increased in both size and complexity. Individual hardware and software solutions to specific problems have, over time, created heterogeneous environments that require tremendous effort to manage. IT staff are resistant to changes, fearing unforeseen consequences. IT is viewed as a cost center, and there is very limited visibility into the Return on Investment for IT spending. At best, this is a recipe for friction between IT and the Business. At worst it leads to failure – of critical systems, of processes, or of the enterprise itself.

Failures are most often caused by mistakes in planning, provisioning, operations, etc. – in short: human error. In fact, research shows that 80% of all mission critical application service downtime is caused by people or process failures (Gartner, 1999). These failures are costly, and often preventable with the benefit of hindsight. Most organizations can learn from their mistakes and avoid making the same mistake twice, but what about all of the *new* ones? When it comes to mistake *avoidance*, many companies are at a loss. Improvements are made and expertise is gained as a byproduct of personally experienced pain (downtime, cost overruns, production delays, etc.).

As a solution, many organizations turn to consultants: it is often the only way to meet the need for expertise in a particular area – expertise derived from diverse experience. In this way, an organization can hope to benefit from the sometimes painful lessons learned by others.

On a much broader scale, the limited ability to effectively utilize the knowledge of others has arguably been the greatest historical constraint on the pace of human innovation. Prior to the advent of written language, scientific and technological advances were limited to what could be learned in the course of a single lifetime. Isaac Newton is most famously credited for saying, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on

the shoulders of giants” (it is his quote that appears on the British two pound coin), implying that his work was built on the efforts of those before him. Since Newton’s time, the pace of scientific discovery and technological innovation has quickened at an exponential rate; the “innovation curve” has steepened. Newton’s discoveries are now considered the “basics” of mathematics and physics, and have given rise to progressively more advanced *applications* of these principles (See: Wright, Orville and Wilbur).

Unfortunately, many businesses continue to operate under a paradigm in which they are forced to learn from their own mistakes, effectively limiting themselves to the same “one lifetime” constraints that *individuals* who seek to innovate freed themselves of long ago. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the domain of Information Technology.

Enter: ITIL.

The Information Technology Infrastructure Library, or ITIL (pronounced EYE-till) is a series of books published by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) in the UK. Each book documents an aspect of IT Management. The books offer a collection of industry “best practices” collected from a diverse group of IT professionals over the course of several years. ITIL books are *descriptive* not *prescriptive*, meaning they focus on processes and organizational structures that have been shown to be effective, rather than offering instructions on how to implement these practices. ITIL is not necessarily meant to be adopted in its entirety, but should rather be treated as one would treat any other reference book: rather than reading cover to cover, we choose specific sections apropos to the task at hand<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps a dated analogy, as the internet has steepened the innovation curve to such an extent that printed dictionaries and encyclopedias are nearly out of date before they can be bound and shipped. It is worth noting, however, that ITIL has largely avoided this by focusing on process and organizational structure as opposed to specific technologies.

Even taken at face value, this is a valuable asset to most organizations. A comprehensive reference library for IT is an invaluable tool with which to improve IT services in pursuit of business goals. Almost every business needs some aspect of what is covered in the ITIL framework. Topics include effective change and release procedures, guidelines as to how to control and account for a complex network of interrelated systems and applications, and accounting models to help quantify the value of IT services in real financial terms.

The breadth of guidance offered is remarkable (it is beyond the scope of this document), but if we go a step further, it is easy to see the parallels between the ITIL best practices and the “basics” of physics and other disciplines. Innovations have been built through practical application of *specific aspects* of mathematics and physics – innovations which would have been impossible without the solid foundation provided by the “giants” that came before.

It follows, then, that using the work of others in the world of IT as a foundation would allow businesses to increase their pace of innovation in a similar manner. The implementation of proven, repeatable IT processes and infrastructure facilitates a shift in focus toward new ways to *use* IT to deliver value to the organization and its customers. A paradigm shift occurs from IT as a cost center to IT as a competitive advantage.

What could your business do if your innovation curve steepened? Could you be first to market with new products, give world class customer service, or improve product quality? Could you reduce your operating costs, increase market share, or take your products global? Competition has always favored those who can effectively innovate; the fast eat the slow. If you could stop worrying about the “basics” of IT and start focusing on the practical applications of IT services, how fast could *you* be?

## Works Cited

Donna Scott. (1999). *Making Smart Investments to Reduce Unplanned Downtime*. Gartner Research.

### **About Creative Enterprise Solutions, LLC:**

Creative Enterprise Solutions provides industry leading training for ITIL and PMP certification, and provides consulting services in IT Service Management and Project Management. The company delivers value to its customers by providing professional, knowledgeable consultants and instructors with a high level of diverse, practical experience. Through a comprehensive portfolio of services, CES is positioned to deliver solutions tailored to the specific needs of each customer.

### **About the Author:**

Brian Flora is a Managing Partner and Principal at Creative Enterprise Solutions, LLC, where he is an IT Service Management consultant and ITIL® course instructor. He has more than 10 years experience in driving technology solutions to business, financial, and logistical issues within enterprise IT environments. Brian is experienced in Business Continuity Planning with an emphasis on Enterprise Storage and Internet technologies, and has led successful organizational development initiatives that have delivered consistent and sustainable operating, revenue, profit, and quality improvements for his clients. Brian attended the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University and holds the ITSM Service Manager certification.