

ITAM & ITSM Synergies

Collaborating with IT Service Management

IT Service Management (ITSM) is revolutionizing the approach to IT operations in medium to large organizations. Although ITSM has been around for some time, the influence is fairly recent, with most organizations developing IT asset management (ITAM) practices first. While most ITSM and ITAM teams cooperate, it is quite common for the disciplines to integrate only through shared data. In order to expand and improve the value of both ITAM and ITSM, improved understanding and communication between the two teams is essential.

IT Service Management (ITSM) is a framework of best practice processes that enable an organization to define, implement, and manage its IT services throughout their lifecycle. While ITAM revolves around the concept of lifecycle management of an asset, ITSM is focused on the lifecycle management of a service. In the ITIL version 3 Service Strategy book, a service is defined as a means of delivering value to customers by facilitating outcomes they want to achieve without ownership of specific costs and/or risks. The integration point between ITAM and ITSM is that many of the attributes and information that ITAM manages is the same information that ITSM requires for service creation, execution and measurement. In this article, we will explore the issues that impact how changes are occurring, what aspects of ITAM should be integrated with ITSM, and outline practical integration points between the two best practice frameworks.

ITAM Issues Complicating ITSM-ITAM Synergy

The business practices that are part of ITAM are well-defined and in place, some more mature than others. Historically, ITAM has been brought into the organization to accomplish specific tasks and those initial tasks often dictate the titles, organizational structure and scope of ITAM responsibilities. The variability in the ownership of ITAM activities adds complexity to the coordination of teams and processes between ITAM and ITSM. For instance, organizations that leased or were planning for a merger or acquisition, approached ITAM as an inventory function, growing the practices into the financial, contractual and

software management aspects over time. The ITAM function is often in the IT department in this type of organization.

Organizations that awoke to IT Asset Management from an expensive software audit experience attended to the harder to manage software first and added hardware management later. Software could now be related to a platform, yielding better information about the environment. These ITAM programs often are part of Procurement or a special unit within IT for IT Procurement.

In addition to these structural issues to coordination, terminology is another road block, creating the opportunity for miscommunication. Many of the same terms used by IT Asset Managers are also part of ITSM, but used in slightly different ways. Learning more about the ITSM terms and how they are used in service management helps close the gap between the two groups.

Service Management Comes to America

In the 1980's the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) in the UK developed the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) in order to better manage the IT services they were providing. Little did they know that what they developed would grow into the globally recognized de facto standard for managing IT services. In the late 1990s, IT Service Management (ITSM)



hit the shores of North America and since then has been spreading like wildfire throughout large and small IT organizations alike. Influenced by the ITIL library, numerous other service management best practices such as COBIT and those developed by ISO are providing guidance to organizations as the transition from functional to service management is implemented. While the U.S. was slower to adopt ITSM than other countries, 80% of U.S. based IT organizations are in some phase of ITSM adoption.

The driving forces for the adoption of ITSM in the U.S. came from the demand from the business for cost transparency, improved IT services, regulatory mandates through acts such as Sarbanes Oxley and HIPAA, major vendor initiatives to automate ITSM, and strategic initiatives such as mergers, acquisitions and outsourcing. Competition and market opportunity led CEOs to focus on customers and demand innovative ways to improve service. With ITSM, one of the advantages is a customer world-view, breaking down communication barriers between Information Technology departments and with their customers. Instead of the technobabble so often used by IT to communicate with the business, the service language bridges the gap by focusing on the "customer" and using their language. The service is collaboratively defined with the business and managed within a Service Catalog. This catalog of services and the lifecycle management processes to maintain the catalog are core to

eliminating the IT "black box" and adding visibility that benefits IT as well. This service approach allows IT to quantify the services delivered to the business and enable more effective chargeback, budgeting, and planning.

ITAM and ITSM Working Together

Historically, ITAM and ITSM have integrated with one another at the Service Desk providing make, model and asset attribute information to support personnel. For slightly more mature organizations, the integration occurs within the Change Management process providing gold standards, configuration, and utilization information. Outside of providing this information, ITAM and ITSM have existed in their own separate worlds with ITAM managing IT assets' quantities, financials, and associated contracts and ITSM defining services and managing/supporting them throughout their lifecycle.

While the separation of the ITAM and ITSM has historically not interfered with IT's ability to meet business needs, the turmoil of the current business climate will no longer allow these frameworks to function in isolation. With the ever increasing demands for IT to become more cost transparent, reduce costs, and adhere to regulatory and compliance mandates, and improve the services being offered, ITAM and the IT Asset Manager must now play a much larger role in the lifecycle management of a service. The need

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for their involvement stems from the fact that ITSM must have a good understanding of the cost of services as well as understanding how those services enable and facilitate the business. Additionally, it is no longer acceptable for ITAM to provide financial data without a services context. This context is defined in business service terms in the ITSM Service Catalog.

How ITAM and ITSM Work Together

There are many ways in which ITAM and ITSM are brought together in an organization, depending on the specific goals and objectives of the organization. However, there are commonly used areas of integration because of the central convergence of ITAM and ITSM around the “service”.

One essential area is in the use of Service Catalog as the taxonomy of how to understand and report within the organization. In the Service Catalog, the organization’s Business Services are defined including the underlying Business Processes, supporting IT Services and their relationship to one another. This business taxonomy is then replicated throughout all process areas, activities, and reports to create a standardized and understandable view to be used by all areas of the organization. The advantage to ITAM is significant since communication issues are reduced between the business departments and the IT professionals due to this standardization.

The next area where ITAM and ITSM are commonly integrated is between the Asset Management Database (AMDB) and the Configuration Management System (CMS) or Configuration Management Database (CMDB). While the AMDB provides counts, quantities, costs, contractual information and the like, the CMS/CMDB provides relationship information. The relationship information

contained within the CMS/CMDB identifies how Business Services, Business Processes, IT Services, IT Components (i.e. Applications and IT Assets) all relate to one another. By associating the AMDB financial and asset configuration information with the CMS/CMDB relationship information, a complete picture of how IT and its assets relate to the business can be made. This information can be invaluable in all kinds of strategy/planning, operational support, service and application/system monitoring, and budgeting activities.

While the cooperation and integration between the AMDB and CMDB is essential, one does not, and should not, replace the other. The AMDB has a corporate focus, uniting financial and contractual information with the physical so that risk of audits is reduced, costs are managed and other corporate needs for information are met. In contrast, the CMS/CMDB is relationship focused so that operational aspects of services are managed and services are seen as business process enablers. Both perspectives and their associated functions are important to the success of the organization.

Another commonly integrated area is ITAM’s Request Management and ITSM’s Request Fulfillment processes. The integration of these two areas is fairly straight forward as they both basically perform the same activities of providing a central location to request anything (whether it is an IT service, product, project, or asset), manage any necessary approvals, and establish standard workflows or sequencing of key actions/events required to fulfill the requests.

For the ITAM professional, the list of skills and experience that would be useful for ITSM includes developing processes and policies, managing projects, line of business departmental knowledge, collaboration and communication skills, and executive reporting. Adding these experiences to those of the ITSM team helps complete the work more quickly, but also adds an “outside IT” perspective to ease communication.

Summary

Service Management is a fundamental and ubiquitous change, altering the terminology, expectations and manner in which business is facilitated within the organization. Service Management and IT Asset Management are compatible and yet do not completely overlap. Each has an important role for the organization as a whole, addressing gaps in process and understanding what would otherwise cost organizations money, time and resources. However, remaining a process-island is unlikely to remain a successful undertaking. The IT Asset Manager who does not become aware and involved with ITSM will miss a great opportunity to achieve more personally and to remain an integral component to the organization’s success.

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