



ITSM Projects: 10 Mistakes You're Probably Making

From ITIL to training to technology, what is hindering your IT service management projects from moving forward successfully?

IT service management (ITSM) projects come in varying sizes and packages. What might be a quick undertaking for one organization, could require a larger investment (time and personnel) for another. At its core, ITSM already brings a strategic approach in the way IT is available to the entire organization. The overall goal for the IT department and the ITSM approach is to implement the right processes, people, and technology to best meet strategic business objectives. To take ITSM to the next level and enable a more process-oriented approach to IT projects, many organizations around the world have adopted ITIL® (IT Infrastructure Library).

ITIL works with best practices for IT project management, while providing the framework necessary for success. Many IT organizations have found success utilizing ITIL throughout their projects, however, there are many who have had little or no success. With so many frameworks and best practices available to IT for project success, where are the downfalls occurring? Listed in no particular order are the 10 biggest mistakes happening in ITSM projects.

Mistake #1: ITIL is Not Implemented

ITIL is a methodology that is adopted to change or add a new improved capability to your processes based on the addition or deletion of current activities you are working through. Many organizations do parts of what ITIL suggests without truly understanding the basics of the framework and how it can benefit their team.

The goal within the organization should not be to focus on ITIL as a project, but focus on business processes and outcomes. This is done by removing constraints to the performance of a business service or by adding a capability that the business service lacks in order to achieve the business strategy.

Organizations should align and integrate their vision, mission, and business goals with IT objectives, and IT objectives should align with running the business and implementing improvement strategies/projects. Success can be measured in many ways and through different tools, but achievement of objectives should be based on critical success factors (CSF) and key performance indicators (KPI). An important ITIL process for doing this is Strategy Management for IT Services, connecting strategic business plans to drive the running, growing, and innovation of the business, enabled by IT.

Mistake #2: Best Practice Training Hasn't Occurred

Failing to train people in the organization on best practices can be detrimental to your strategic goals. ITIL training creates a link from the job role within the organization to the overarching strategic goals. Without the proper ITIL training, people will base their decisions on their experiences. Experience knowledge is good, but the ability to become a strategic partner to the business comes through best practices that have been proven in the industry.

Also, service and support personnel may need training in areas of governance, meeting facilitation, negotiation, and project management. It's critical to note that ITIL works best when combined with other best practices.

Mistake #3: Not Understanding Technology Requirements

How do support personnel provide exceptional service without truly understanding the technology selection related to business needs? Beyond that, having a firm grasp of the current and future desired level of service and process maturity, will help point service management projects in the right direction.

It's rare that technology doesn't need some kind of customization or configuration to fit appropriately within your business' operating model. Technology can be overwhelming, extremely complicated, and actually a distractor to achieving a business outcome. So, avoid focusing on just a technical outcome with no real business value related to adoption or improvement of a process.

Mistake #4: Planning and Scaling Personnel for Changes

Not understanding how to change your team's organizational structure limits your influence on the behavior of people in the organization. The adoption of ITIL usually leads to new roles and functions within the organization. For example, functions such as the Service Management Office can often be a key to success with your practice of ITIL. Also, new roles such as Service Owner, can make a big difference in your project results.

Mistake #5: Not Engaging Experts to Help

While it may feel like a large expenditure, consultants can help save money and time toward achieving your objectives. At times, organizations look at consultants as very expensive, but the cost should be weighted against the business outcomes needed for continuity and competitiveness. Not achieving a business goal can be more expensive and risky than engaging an outside perspective.

An organization should not hire consultants that are just ITIL experts. The most pivotal consultant will bring to your organization real-world experience and success stories from organizations who have gone through implementation or adoption projects. Always utilize consultants with a quick win approach, although your overall project may be lengthy, celebrate short-term success milestones.

Mistake #6: Avoiding the Bigger Operational Picture

It's not incorrect to focus on operational efficiency through process improvement, but the business has to ask itself if that focus will enable it to run, grow, and innovate. Within each service management project, the underlying goal is always going to be service improvement. Organizations may improve a process, but not achieve any business value. Organizations should always ask themselves when improving a process:

- What value does it bring to the business and customer?
- How does the process improvement support the business strategy?
- What is the overall service value chain?
- Was a constraint removed in service performance?

There is a strategy for incident management and this improvement should support that strategy, including economic value and management of return on investment (ROI), total cost of ownership (TCO), value of investment (VOI), and return on asset (ROA).

Mistake #7: Strictly Focusing on ITIL

Do not just focus on the 26 ITIL processes. The key to successful projects is process adoption and improvement related to capability gaps for achieving business outcomes. Focusing on organizational efficiency should not be ignored, but it should be organizational efficiency toward economic value that leads to lower TCO for a service.

An effective, efficient, and economical service management approach can consist of other process areas, functions, and roles not mentioned in ITIL, but may be found in other best practices. The valuable adoption of a best practice for your organization requires an understanding of what the organization needs in terms of people, processes, technology, partners, and capabilities.

Mistake #8: Negating IT to a Technology-Only Role

You have a deep understanding of your core competency, but avoid turning your organization into an IT company. Use your understanding of best practices to support business outcomes and focus on the business needs, rather than just managing IT. Working to become the best IT company takes the focus away from why IT exists. Many IT projects and implementations have no business value and can be construed as just “hobbies” of the IT people. Think about innovations in the industry that can help you with business performance, such as cloud computing, DevOps, big data analytics, and IoT, and the relationship of new innovations to your overall service value chain.

Mistake #9: Forgetting About the Most Important Factor..the Customer

The customer is number one. Whether your customer is internal or external, your ultimate goal is to provide exceptional service to those customers through interactions and products. Services that aren't needed, aren't used, or have partially used capabilities have little or no value to the customer. If a service has little or no value to a customer, it has little or no value to a service supplier and may have a negative impact on the supplier's organization.

Customers want good to great experiences through a service. Organizations need to keep this in mind and formally address the customer experience in their processes and measurements.

Mistake #10: Forgetting About Service Quality and Success

The customer does not always need everything that IT wants to deliver, so having a significant IT focus versus a service-oriented focus is a big mistake. A key part of business and IT strategy is deciding what not to do. Making these decisions should be done from a customer-focused perspective and not an IT-focused perspective.

Organizations need to audit service capabilities to determine if the customer of each service actually needs the capability. If the answer is no, then it's a waste of resources that affect the economic value of the service. Focus has to be on delivering and supporting services that customers want, and not overextending IT's delivery for a specific service capability.

Conclusion

Although these are common mistakes that many organizations experience, they are easily avoidable for the service and support group within your organization. Often these mistakes can cause a loss of faith in the proven best practices, such as ITIL, but flagging them before they become true issues allows you to continuously encourage service success across the organization. As always it's important to avoid complexity, if possible, and simplify as much as possible. Remember, these processes are for the greater good and pivotal in improving the social, economic, and psychological value of your organization.



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For more than thirty years, Anthony Orr has worked in various IT strategy, managerial, consulting, executive advisory, marketing, and technical positions. Anthony is author of the ITIL v3 2011 publications and the ITIL MALC exam book, as well as a Sr. Examiner for the ITIL v2, v3 and Cyber-Resilience certification examinations. He has published numerous podcasts, videos, booklets, white papers and articles, including a white paper, Synergies between ITIL and DevOps, with AXELOS. Having traveled to over 50 countries and lectured at universities around the world, Anthony is also a frequent speaker at international and local ITSM industry events.

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