

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

The Official Introduction to the ITIL Service Lifecycle

The key factor that differentiates many companies is not the products they sell, but the services they provide. This month, I look at the first two volumes of the Information Technology Infrastructure Library, version 3 (ITILv3), and an introduction to ITILv3. These books are the official versions, published by the Stationery Office of the UK government, with the permission of the Office of Government Commerce (the trademark holder of the term ITIL).

To understand ITILv3 completely, it is necessary to read the remaining volumes that aren't covered in this review. My decision to look at these first volumes was simply a matter of return on investment. ITIL can be a daunting topic, particularly when the services you provide evolved over years with little or no conscious effort to design or monitor them. By implementing the methodology discussed in these volumes, you can quickly achieve dramatic improvements in the services you provide

Despite my belief that the whole spectrum of ITIL is worth understanding, I think the remaining three volumes – *Service Transition*, *Service Operation*, and *Continual Service Improvement* – address useful aspects of ITILv3 but might overwhelm many people by the amount of material covered. Once you get into the material, these remaining volumes are a valuable addition and worth a closer look.

The Official Introduction to the ITIL Service Lifecycle introduces the ITIL service lifecycle. A common theme throughout all of the volumes is that, properly implemented, this is a cycle: You don't stop once you have implemented the methodology. Instead, it is a continual process of design, implementation, eval-

uation, and then back to design. This introductory volume illustrates that each phase influences every other phase.

The book begins by introducing ITIL and service management, followed by a chapter on the core concepts of ITILv3. If you are new to ITIL, this is a great overview, although more information on ITIL history and a detailed comparison of the different versions would be helpful.

The bulk of the book then introduces topics that are covered in more detail in the remaining volumes.

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Service Strategy

Service Strategy is essentially about deciding what services you will be providing to your customers. Dealing with the effects of poorly defined services is a key aspect of ITIL, for both the customer and service provider.

This book emphasizes that simply creating a list of the services you provide is not enough. Also, you must ensure that the services are clearly understood and actually reflect what the provider and recipient expect.

An explanation of what services mean in terms of IT is followed by a chapter on the "practice" and processes of service management. In the chapter "Service Strategy Principles," I found places that described aspects of service defini-

tion that would have saved my company time and effort if we had considered them five years ago, plus a few points that confirmed where we did it right. For example, one problem occurs with services that were defined on the basis of customer perception of the service rather than what we were really providing.

The "Service Economics" chapter addresses the front-end aspects of defining

services; namely, what expenses (money, material, manpower) are involved in defining your services.

A discussion of the economic aspects of what happens or could happen six months after improperly defined services are implemented, however, is missing.

For more information about the books, visit: <http://www.itil.org.uk/ss.htm>

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Service Design

What good is it if you have a great idea – or service strategy – but it is poorly implemented? *Service Design* does a great job of helping you design your services, covering mundane things such as what “availability” means, to more abstract things such as what benefits the service offers.

After chapters that provide an introduction and discuss the principles of service design, the 100-page chapter “Service Design Processes” explains that designing effective and efficient services is not a matter of simply sitting down and describing the services in a single session. Instead, it is an ongoing process that continues even after the service is implemented. (The volume *Continual Service Improvement* offers a more in-depth view of this topic.)



Because of the nature of my job, I really enjoyed the chapter called “Service Design Technology-Related Activities.”

This chapter looks at the activities surrounding the technology, including more abstract things such as your infrastructure, data management, and so forth.

The book concludes with several appendices that provide a summary of the material, including a number of example forms for implementing services, service-level agreements, environmental architectures and standards, your services catalog, checklists, example contents of a “Statement of Requirement (SoR) and/or Invitation to Tender (ITT),” and contents of a capacity plan.

Finally, there is a list of references and a glossary with an acronyms list and definitions list and an index.

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