

# **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC Success-Based White Paper*

There are many white papers available detailing the reasons why ITIL adoption fails. These “failure-based” papers are often thinly veiled attempts by vendors to market products. Proposing that all organizations face the same ITIL adoption challenges and that examining those succeeding in adopting ITIL offer more value than those failing, *this* paper delivers a “success-based” approach to ITIL adoption by describing, without bias, the top 10 traits of organizations successfully adopting ITIL.

**By**

**Hank Marquis**

[hank.marquis@itsmsolutions.com](mailto:hank.marquis@itsmsolutions.com)

**February 2006**

Updated 20 June 2006

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

### **Copyright and Trademark Notice**

Copyright © 2006 Nichols-Kuhn Group. itSM Solutions™ is a trademark of itSM Solutions LLC. ITIL ® is a Registered Trade Mark, and a Registered Community Trade Mark of the Office of Government Commerce, and is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and is used here by itSM Solutions LLC under license from and with the permission of OGC (Trade Mark License No. 0002). IT Infrastructure Library ® is a Registered Trade Mark of the Office of Government Commerce and is used here by itSM Solutions LLC under license from and with the permission of OGC (Trade Mark License No. 0002). Other product names mentioned in this guide may be trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective companies.

### **Notice of Rights / Restricted Rights Legend**

All rights reserved. No title or ownership of this document, any portion thereof, or its contents is transferred. No part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of itSM Solutions LLC. Reproduction prohibitions do not apply to this document when reproduced for non-commercial use, or to excerpts or quotes for use in reviews or attributed quotes in other works of any type as allowed for in copyright law. For additional information, please contact:

itSM Solutions LLC  
31 South Talbert Blvd #295  
Lexington, NC 27292  
Phone (336) 510-2885  
Fax (336) 798-6296  
Web <http://www.itSMSolutions.com>

### **Notice of Liability**

This guide is distributed "As Is," without warranty of any kind, either express or implied, respecting the content of this guide, including but not limited to implied warranties for the guide's quality, performance, merchantability, or fitness for any particular purpose. Neither the authors, nor itSM Solutions LLC, its dealers or distributors shall be liable with respect to any liability, loss or damage caused or alleged to have been caused directly or indirectly by the contents of this guide.

## **Executive Summary**

All IT organizations face the same challenges. These challenges lead many to investigate adopting the best practices of the *IT Infrastructure Library* (ITIL®.) While not all ITIL adopters succeed in overcoming these challenges, many do. Those that face these challenges and overcome them provide valuable lessons about what it took to succeed.

The steps required for successful adoption of ITIL practices resides in those adopters who succeeded, not in those who failed. Examining successful ITIL adoptions often provides much more value than examining failed adoptions. Post mortems provide some insight into the issue, but by definition, not the solutions to overcome those challenges. Those that failed have little to offer but theories of what might have been; those that succeeded met the issues head-on -- and won!

A study of successful adoptions yields a treasure trove of experiences. Let us take a moment to examine some notable success stories:

- The Ontario Justice Enterprise attributes its ITIL initiative with slashing support costs by 40%.
- Procter & Gamble shows a 6% to 8% cut in operating costs and a reduction in technology staff of between 15% and 20% because of ITIL adoption. This equates to over \$125 million in savings.
- Arizona Public Service (APS) claims ITIL best practices slashed systems downtime by 50 percent and improved its mean time to repair by 75 percent.
- Shell Oil can now roll out an application update to 80,000 desktops globally within 72 hours, and estimates that it now saves 6,000 work hours, or about \$5 million per year on just that single activity.

These are just the tip of the iceberg. The above lists only a few examples of cost reductions. In addition, ITIL aids in regulatory compliance (e.g., HIPPA, GLBA, FFIEC, etc.) and auditing (SAS-70, Sarbanes-Oxley, etc.)

So why then do so many articles, presentations, and white papers focus on why ITIL adoptions fail? With so many success stories available, one has to wonder why the authors of these “failure based” approaches to ITIL adoption choose negativity for their press and marketing activities. Looking beneath the surface of these headline-grabbing papers, we often see thinly veiled attempts by vendors to use scare tactics to steer the reader to their own prescriptive, and often all-encompassing, solutions to implementing ITIL best practices. If industry best practices drive successful ITIL adoption, then why do we reach out so eagerly to standardized products from outside

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

entities instead of reaching in to improve our own capability to adopt and implement ITIL best practices?

My purpose in writing this white paper is to take a different approach, a **success-based** approach. As such, this paper presents a view into success with ITIL adoption without any product or vendor bias.

*You can learn how to succeed with ITIL. Your success with ITIL lies in improving the skills and abilities of you and your staff.*

Among those successful in the adoption of ITIL, one can identify several key commonalities. Accepting that a success-based approach to ITIL adoption is more useful, an evaluation of the common experiences of these successful adopters yields valuable insight into the potential problems that can occur, and the solutions required to overcome these problems. In short, you can learn how to succeed with ITIL. Your success with ITIL lies in improving the skills and abilities of you and your staff.

It is the position of this paper that a more complete and useful understanding of what makes ITIL adoption successful occurs from analyzing successful adoption instead of vendor sales materials. Based on that assumption this paper then presents the 10 common traits that seem to foretell success with ITIL.

### ***Top Ten Traits Predicting ITIL Success***

Having worked with many companies, and observing many, many more, I began to realize that it was not the software, consultants, or training you purchase (or do not purchase) that controls successful ITIL implementation. Below I present my list of the top 10 traits of Successful ITIL Adopters:

- 1) Understanding the Politics of ITIL**
- 2) Accepting that ITIL is an IT Matter**
- 3) Gaining Management Commitment**
- 4) Acknowledging the Goal**
- 5) Keeping it Simple**
- 6) Remembering ITIL is a Process**
- 7) Recognizing that ITIL Does Not Stand Alone**
- 8) Realizing that ITIL Implementation is a Project**
- 9) Discovering that the Biggest Obstacle is Change**
- 10) Learning that You Can Do It Yourself**

Following I examine each of these 10 key requirements for success. I will explain what it means, how to achieve it, and relate it to a successful implementation.

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

### ***Trait #1: Understanding the Politics of ITIL***

The goal of the ITIL is to deliver IT services to Customers and Users. The ITIL provides a collection of processes, activities, and tasks set within the context of roles and responsibilities.

The issue you must bear in mind regarding the politics of ITIL is that ITIL processes and workflows cross many traditional IT boundaries of responsibility.

Realize that many IT organizations still use a technology-driven “silo” approach. In these organizations, management consciously focuses expertise and control by technology domain. Often, each silo has its own management establishment. All too often, the head of each silo vies with the other silo heads for the top position within an IT organization, resulting in friction and competition inside the IT organization.

Abraham Lincoln noted, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” When each IT “silo” acts autonomously in its own “best interest” there is little interaction between silos, and in some cases, there is outright hostility. Everyone loses in this scenario. When IT realizes that IT service delivery is a horizontal end-to-end process and not a vertical technology silo process, everybody wins.

*When IT realizes that service delivery is a horizontal end-to-end process and not a vertical technology silo process, everybody wins.*

In a recent study of organizations that thoroughly examined ITIL and then made an enlightened decision not to implement, the top reason cited was “Not enough of the organization would participate.”

Users of services do not see IT technology silos, and they do not perceive IT services as composed of silos. Users perceive IT services as end-to-end structures. This difference in views -- IT with a technology focus and Users with an end-to-end focus -- often results from the “silo mentality” of IT. This “silo mentality” appears when each IT silo reports that all is well, but the Users complain of inadequacies.

Successful ITIL adoption depends upon cross-silo process interaction and shared responsibilities. For ITIL to succeed, the entire IT organization, including all silos and their management, must work together as a service-delivery chain.

### ***Trait #2: Accepting that ITIL is an IT Matter***

While acknowledging the fact that ITIL benefits Customers and Users, it is very important to realize that ITIL is an IT matter. IT must align with the Business in order to deliver services required by Customer and Users. However, business strategic, commercial, and political matters are not components of an ITIL implementation. The Business will not drive ITIL adoption, only IT can drive ITIL adoption.

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

It is incumbent upon us within IT to communicate, convince, and justify our plans. IT leaders must take the responsibility to accept, first, that ITIL is for IT, and, second, that they must take ownership of communicating ITIL benefits to the business in business terms.

*IT leaders must take the responsibility to accept first that ITIL is for IT, and second that they must take ownership of communicating ITIL benefits to the business in business terms.*

That is the key issue here. For many years, all IT had to do was state the requirements, and the business paid the bill. That is an odd arrangement considering that every other department has to justify its position. No marketing department worth its salt introduces a new product and commits the company to a product development cycle without doing market analysis, understanding the profit potential, describing the costs, and adapting to market needs. IT has forgotten this, and the only way to succeed in selling ITIL to the top is to learn how!

ITIL is a process for improving the performance of IT staff, services, and operations. The cause is IT improvement; the result is higher IT performance. Only after this realization can you begin to approach and obtain the 3<sup>rd</sup> trait.

### ***Trait #3: Gaining Management Commitment.***

Understanding that the politics of ITIL (Trait #1) requires senior management commitment, and accepting responsibility for generating this commitment (Trait #2), the entire IT organization must agree to ITIL adoption, and all staff and management must work together as a service-delivery chain. At the same time, IT needs a champion and protector.

This requires a strong leader with the ability to influence all of IT and impress the Business. There are numerous methods for gaining senior management commitment, starting with the *Continuous Service Improvement Program* (CSIP), progressing through audits and business driver alignment on the way to the economic benefits of ITIL.

For ITIL to succeed you must have strong management over the IT organization. This management must have and exercise the power to make it clear to all of IT that the ITIL process implementation is the new normal, and that failure to support the implementation is not acceptable.

Management commitment extends beyond senior management, all the way down to the supervisor or team-leader level. Successful adopters comment on the open and free-flowing information within their organizations; and the willingness of all involved to take ownership when and where required.

*Successful adopters comment on the open and free flowing information within their organizations; and the willingness of all involved to take ownership when and where required.*

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

### ***Trait #4: Acknowledging the Goal***

*For ITIL to succeed you must plan several visible quick wins to gain and keep the positive momentum required.*

Successful ITIL implementations start with the goal of benefiting Customers and Users through the concept of the “quick win.” A quick win is an immediate, visible benefit that Customer and Users will realize.

This contains two critical bits of wisdom: first, you have to implement ITIL in pieces, going after the “squeaky wheel” first; second, you need to continue delivering value visible to the Customer and User.

For ITIL to succeed you must plan several visible quick wins to gain and keep the positive momentum required.

### ***Trait #5: Keeping it Simple***

*If there is a revolution, it will be in your thinking, communicating, and management skills.*

ITIL adoption is an IT-effort, but the purpose of the effort is to benefit Customers and Users of IT Services. Increased efficiency and effectiveness of IT are the result of ITIL. An improved IT department yields higher benefits to Customers and Users.

You cannot and will not implement ITIL overnight. Implementations take 1 to 3 years.

Practically speaking this means you will not implement everything in the ITIL, nor will you implement whatever you decide to implement all at once. Successful ITIL adoption is evolution, not revolution. If there is a revolution, it will be in your thinking, communicating, and management skills.

### ***Trait #6: Remembering that ITIL is Process***

ITIL is about process. A process is not a project -- a project has a defined start and stop point; a process is a continuous function. Remember that a process is a particular course of action intended to achieve a result. As such, any business process, including ITIL, has certain requirements.

In order to operate effectively, efficiently, economically and equitably, a process requires roles (owner, manager, implementer, auditor, etc.), responsibilities (outputs, conformance to requirements, etc.), authorities (ability to direct or perform activities, etc.), activities (actions required to meet responsibilities, etc.), and procedures (documentation of how to perform actions required, etc.)

For ITIL to succeed you must establish the process:

- define roles and responsibilities clearly
- select and empower a process owner with cross-silo management scope
- select and empower a manager responsible for establishment, auditing and day-to-day operational oversight

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

- define process workflow responsibilities in enough detail for workers to follow
- implement process reporting and auditing in order to continuously improve the efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity of the process

*Don't spend too much time trying to create perfect workflow diagrams procedures -- have just enough process documentation to allow the system to work.*

The key bit of wisdom in this requirement is to establish strong management control, not to go overboard in the creation of other process elements. You must not spend too much time trying to create perfect workflow diagrams and “all seeing” procedures. Instead, make sure your process owners and managers are in tune with ITIL tenets, and have just enough process documentation to allow the system to work.

For ITIL to succeed you must adopt elements of your existing workflow, process, and procedures while molding new behaviors into existing workers.

### ***Trait #7: Recognizing that ITIL Does not Stand Alone***

ITIL is more than just two books on Service Support and Service Delivery. There are dozens of ITIL books; old and new. However, ITIL is clear that it does not stand alone, and in fact, can only succeed within a context of a Continuous Service Improvement Program, using some form of Process Maturity Framework and Quality Management System.

#### **Continuous Service Improvement Process**

The ITIL describes itself as functioning under a *Continuous Service Improvement Program* or CSIP. The CSIP must tie back to key business drivers. Common business drivers include regulatory compliance with industry regulations like *Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council's (FFIEC)*, *The Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA)*, the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)*, *FDA 21 CFR 11 (Title 21 Code of Federal Regulations Electronic Records; Electronic Signatures)*, *Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)* and others.

All regulatory compliance business drivers require reporting and auditing. Common audit schemes include *Statement on Auditing Standards (SAS) No. 70*, is for Service Organizations, including IT service providers. SAS 70 is an internationally recognized auditing standard developed by the *American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)*. Another popular audit is for compliance with the *Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002*.

*Successful companies use other best practices in addition to ITIL.*

Commonly successful companies use other best practices in addition to ITIL. For example, many successful companies use *Control Objectives for Information and related Technology (COBIT)*. COBIT is a framework for information (IT) management risks created by the *Information Systems*

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

*Audit and Control Association (ISACA), and the IT Governance Institute (ITGI).*

There is a direct connection from the business driver to auditing. Audits report on organizational compliance to regulations. The CSIP must steer IT toward systems and methods that allow successful audits according to industry business drivers.

For ITIL to succeed you must clearly identify your own business drivers, the auditing that must be in place to document conformance, and most importantly the stakeholders within the organization. This is the only proven method of obtaining the management commitment ITIL requires.

### **Process Maturity Framework**

ITIL calls for a Process Maturity Framework to identify organizational and process maturity and capability -- the "where" to implement and the "when" to begin implementing ITIL processes, and the definition of the "desired end-state." There are several well-known Process Maturity Framework options, including *Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI, previously CMM)*, *COBIT Governance Maturity Model (GMM)* and the ITIL PMF.

For ITIL to succeed you must choose and use one and only one Process Maturity Framework consistently.

### **Quality Management System**

ITIL calls for a Quality Management System as the "how to" to manage quality improvement and implementation. There are numerous QMS options including Deming, Six Sigma, LEAN, and others. ITIL provides the "what" to consider. The Quality Management System provides the "how to" for managing an implementation by indicating how processes can be improved step-by-step.

For ITIL to succeed you must choose and use one and only one Quality Management System consistently.

### ***Trait #8: Realizing That ITIL Implementation is a Project***

Remembering that ITIL is a process (6<sup>th</sup> trait), and recognizing that ITIL does not stand-alone (7<sup>th</sup> trait) successful adopters all treat ITIL implementation as an IT project.

*For ITIL to succeed you must approach it as a project, using sound project management techniques.*

Project Management underlies everything done, built, or delivered within IT (and most other functional areas.) The best practice for Project Management is the *Project Management Institute (PMI) Project Management Book of Knowledge (PMBOK.) Projects IN Controlled*

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

*Environments* (PRINCE) is another project management system closely aligned to the ITIL.

For ITIL to succeed you must approach its adoption as a project, using sound project management techniques.

### ***Trait #9: Discovering that the Biggest Obstacle is People***

Repeatedly, successful ITIL implementers mention that their success came from their people. They attribute their success to not just the commitment of management, but also to the commitment of the line staff that will perform the ITIL duties day in and day out.

Remember that ITIL is a process, and as a process, it requires people do things in a certain manner. People do things how they choose to do things, not how you tell them to do things. The ability to gain the active support, commitment, and enthusiasm of line staff workers is a key requirement.

*You must lead by example; involving line staff in the entire process from the initial decision to implement, through process design and into process establishment.*

People do not like change. It is a fact that IT staff work in what is arguably the most dynamic, fast-paced and rapidly changing of fields. It is also a fact that IT staff members are some of the most resistant people when it comes to change.

The only proven method to gain the commitment of staff required to change is involving line staff in the adoption process. You must lead by example; involving line staff in the entire process from the initial decision to implement, through process design and into process establishment.

For ITIL to succeed you will need to use sound interpersonal and change management skills to involve staff at all levels in the entire adoption process.

### ***Trait #10: Learning that You Can Do It Yourself***

It is very common for training vendors, software suppliers, and consultants to create the impression that ITIL adoption will not succeed without training, new software or consultants. However, this is only true to a degree -- you can do it all yourself, if you know (or learn) what you have to accomplish.

Successful adopters all report using some trainers or tools, that's a given. However, they often further clarify this by describing how they learned how to do things required by ITIL themselves. For example, you can hire an outside firm to audit your internal processes. Aside from the questions arising from the motivations of the auditor (e.g., are they trying to sell something), *you learn how to do nothing*. Successful adopters learned how to things themselves, and then made these changes the “new normal” in their organizations.

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

*Successful adopters all report using trainers and tools; however, they describe how they learned how to do things required by ITIL themselves.*

When the trainers and consultants go home, you and your staff remain. The best programs you can undertake are to improve the skills and abilities of you and your people. Instead of hiring process engineers or expensive software, consider learning how to things yourself.

For ITIL to succeed you and your staff must learn new skills and use them during the implementation.

## **Conclusion**

Studying organizations that successfully adopted ITIL best practice is more useful than focusing on those that failed. Those that succeeded faced the same issues as those that failed; however, those that succeeded were able to overcome those issues. Thus, a more complete understanding of what makes ITIL adoption successful occurs from analyzing successful adoptions.

A “success-based” approach is more useful to those contemplating ITIL adoption a “failure-based” approach. Given the scarcity of “success-based” evaluations and abundance of “failure-based” evaluations, it appears then that the purpose of these “failure-based” evaluations is to act as a marketing gimmick.

Accepting that a “success-based” approach to ITIL adoption is more useful, an evaluation of the common experiences of successful adopters yields interesting insight into the potential problems that will occur, and the solutions required to overcome these problems. The traits of successful ITIL adopters include:

- Understanding the Politics of ITIL and how existing organization structure affects the possibility of success. Indeed, it seems that organization structure plays a key element in the decision to implement or not; and the success of the implementation.
- Accepting that ITIL is an IT matter alone, and even though through the process of improving IT you will improve Business services, ITIL is an IT activity.
- Gaining the management commitment required to conform organizational priorities such that the entire IT organization actively participates in the ITIL implementation and operation.
- While ITIL is an IT matter, acknowledge that improvements in IT operations through ITIL must yield visible and quick benefits to Customers and Users. Quick wins are necessary and you must plan form them well in advance, and even delay change that is more technical in order to deliver visible positive value from ITIL.
- Keeping it simple and remembering that the goal of ITIL is to improve IT for the sake of improving services to Customers and

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

Users. To create and maintain the momentum required to sustain the commitment of all involved you must schedule quick-wins, and you must implement around ITIL in pieces.

- Remembering that ITIL is a process, not a map. You must define all the roles, grant, (or obtain) the authority and document the responsibilities of all involved. The bulk of the activity must be on establishing management controls. While necessary, do not spend too much time defining complex workflow or process diagrams. You are already running an organization; adapt and conform your existing policies and procedures to ITIL.
- ITIL does not stand alone and requires other best practices for success. Before beginning the ITIL implementation, make sure you have Process Maturity Framework, a Quality Management System, and that you understand your business drivers and the regulations under which you will perform.
- Realizing that ITIL implementation is a project and only sound project management techniques can handle the details required to implement and maintain the implementation over time.
- Discovering that your biggest obstacle is people and you must devote considerable efforts to motivating line staff as well as managers. The ultimate success of your implementation depends on the people on the line who must carry out your plans.
- Learning that you can do it yourself, but you have to learn how to do it yourself. If you rely upon outside vendors, you will soon find that you are no longer in control. You and your staff must learn new skills, and apply them in order to make ITIL the “new normal” for your organization.

## **“The 10 Traits of Successful ITIL Adopters”**

*An itSM Solutions LLC White Paper*

---

### **About itSM Solutions LLC**

After becoming one of the leading IT Service Management providers in North America, we decided to focus exclusively on IT Service Management educational services. Drawing extensively on our own experience in the IT world and the best practices in IT Service Management as documented in the IT Infrastructure Library, we assist IT organizations of all sizes in achieving operational excellence through the adoption of a customer-focused, process-oriented, cost-effective approach to IT. Among our educational offerings is the complete suite of ITSM certification and awareness courses. itSM Solutions is accredited by ISEB and EXIN for the delivery of the ITSM Foundation Practitioner and Service Manager. We focus in IT Service Management education. Our goal is to provide you educational services that will guide you on your ITSM journey along with the knowledge base you need to select the right consultant should you need help along the way.

### **About the Author**

Hank Marquis, an IT Service Management industry pioneer who began his career in IT in 1980, has over 25 years of practical, hands-on experience as an IS/IT practitioner and manager. He is a partner at itSM Solutions LLC, and is the author of seven books on IT topics, including Cisco, CompTIA, ISEB and EXIN accredited certification programs, has had many other articles and papers published, and is regularly sought out by IT executives for advice on adopting the ITIL successfully. He is an early proponent, adopter, and contributor to the ITIL community, and has Managers (Masters) level ITIL certification. He is currently pursuing a PhD in organizational psychology.