Had I known then, what I know now...

By Corde Wagner
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How many times have you found yourself saying, "Why didn't I think of that?", or "How did they (that company, person, vendor) create that SLA?" (and will they let me have a copy)? Or, perhaps you'll admit to the thought "Had I known about 'blah' way back when, my life (job, struggles, IT processes, etc.) would be so much better (easier, or plug in your own 'bla'' point)!"

How realization of an existing idea can be called an "Ah Ha" moment

A cartoon artist creates a light bulb above the head of their character to represent when that character has a new or a newly discovered idea. If we can plug in that image of a light bulb, could we also say that the moment we realized that "Had I known that a framework for 'Change Management' already existed . . .", can be expressed as an "Ah Ha" moment?

Unfortunately, or at least within my own corporate experiences, many of these "ah ha" discoveries for IT come with the expense of some high-priced consulting firm indicating that your organization is hampered by the lack of that very something that was presented to you, way… back… then. Oh gosh, "Had I known then what I know now" can also include a heavy price tag on your already tight budget. Funny how that happens huh?

Making the connection with inventing processes and finding they already exist

One such ITIL "Ah Ha" moment came for me, roughly 6 years after having formed my first ad-hoc helpdesk and nearly 5 years after having created a list (aka: Service Catalog) of what IT supported in my company.

Perhaps I should also mention that the list was driven by increasing customer demand that, of course, I could not account for because I did not have an Incident/Request Process. It also came along with a very frustrating attempt at creating an "SLA" (for which I had no experience, no templates and apparently no guidance for how to make a Service Level Agreement, etc.). It's a sad, but true story.

As one would hope, or maybe expect, my light bulb moment came during my first ITIL Foundation training. For many of the process points discussed, I was internally saying (or in some cases right out loud) "Geeez, this is exactly what I was doing at XYZ company", or "OH! I wish I had known about ITIL when I was at ABC company, trying to develop how our helpdesk should operate." And yes, I continue to say often: "What the heck, how could ITIL have been around all these years and I'd never heard of it?"

Maybe the investment in an IT Service Management consulting firm would have helped me discover ITIL sooner? Or, maybe like a lot of other IT leaders and managers, I was stuck in the "I know it all" or it wasn't invented here syndrome?

All I know is that had I known way back then about the ITIL, a huge amount of time, effort, stress and anxiety (for me and my customers) would have been replaced by a great deal less stress and conflict.

Being informed and knowing now what you will want to know later?

I am proud to be a practicing IT Service Manager, and I do know now, that ITIL is and should be an everyday part of the growing formal and documented IT processes for my organization. This is in part because ITIL is a widely accepted, well-documented, time-proven and highly effective framework, but mainly it is because as an IT organization we have made the long-term commitment to implement ITIL-

framed processes.

The recently updated v3 of ITIL brings even more clarity (from the predecessor v2) for those who use ITIL and especially for those who do not know ITIL; this is because virtually all that an IT organization would want to know with respect to developing, documenting and delivering on those IT services and processes most common to any small, medium or even enterprise IT organization is referenced in the ITIL.

The ITIL not only connects what your development organization's role is with IT, it provides a definitive process framework for a helpdesk (or Service Desk – read the ITIL to discover the difference), and what your infrastructure operations (server and network ops, data center, etc.) will do, or the information that many other IT process groups may require in order to support their customers and organization as well.

At the risk of sounding like an "infomercial," one of the truly great things about the ITIL is that you can continue to learn and build, and expand and mature your operations and IT processes through the expansive Service Lifecycle information generate by ITIL v3.

For example, by listening in on a free webinar, I learned that the catalog I built years ago could and should have had definitive information; the ITIL helped me with that by spelling out what the components of the catalog are, and even how the catalog fits into the overall "Service Portfolio". I have learned more about Service Level Management from v3 Service Design concepts in recent months than all of the years since building my first (and very weak I am afraid to admit) SLA.

Why ITIL?

Every IT manager, director or CIO should be looking for ways to reduce costs while also providing excellent and reliable service/support to their customers. With adopting and implementing ITIL you can do more. With the necessary energy and effort; with clear support from the top (crucial to success) and a careful deployment of each phase of the implementation, your organization(s) will be more efficient and effective via consistent processes and procedures.

Ultimately your services provided to your customers and business will provide more value and more reliability from the practices that the ITIL Change, Incident, Request, Release, Validation and other critical-to-quality processes bring. For your efforts and the dollars required, there is no better investment in your people, processes and products than with and via the ITIL.

Summary

Not wanting to feel anything other than great about what you've accomplished in your IT career is often shaken by the nagging feeling that you should know or do more; I know I've felt that way. The reality is that by adopting ITIL and investing in training and the development of "good practices" with ITIL will in all likelihood save you the pain and frustration that I and many other IT managers have experienced.

I hope though this revelation of accepting a new way, or of embracing the idea of a "good practice" being good, or even that something not invented by you can be good, will lead you to putting some serious thought into learning more about the ITIL.

If you already know about ITIL, but haven't quite realized the great value I have espoused here, revisit the new and improved v3 of ITIL. Just do it! Do not put yourself in the position of regretting not having learned and known now, what you'll surely wished you knew someday in the future, when you really (REALLY) need it.

About Corde Wagner: Corde is a Service Manager practitioner, learning from past experiences and something new about ITIL every day. He is currently leading the ITSM implementation for the IT organization at the National Ignition Facility in Livermore CA. http://www.linkedin.com/in/cordewagner