

ITILs effect on organizational culture, worklife and success from the employee perspective

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Abstract

Existing academic research on ITIL provides insight on several success factors when implementing. Although this is a well-documented topic, the subjects for collecting data were often ITIL experts or IT executives, consultants or managers. This implies that academic research concerning ITIL is frequently presented from an expert point of view. This paper highlights this research gap and aims to add the employee perspective to existing academic research in Norway.

1 Introduction

With the Norwegian Information Technology Service Management Forum (itSMF) being the leading advocate for the use of ITSM (Information Technology Service Management) concepts in Norway, it would not be unreasonable to claim that ITSM practices remain a relevant topic in the IT community. Among the vast specter of approaches, ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) v2011 is often acknowledged as the most well-known framework within ITSM. The framework is often referred to as a “best practice” approach that aims to help organizations to manage their IT services, customers, service catalog and work processes.

ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) v2011 is often acknowledged as the most well-known framework within ITSM. ITIL can be summarized as a collection of experience and “best practice” approaches gathered over several years when working with IT services. According to Michael Scarborough [19] some of the overall benefits with the framework include increased return of investment regarding the organization’s information technology, which is often a results from some of the frameworks recommendations on how to develop a service catalog, work processes, roles and functions[15]. Although the framework is considered a “best practice” approach, striving to accomplish all of the suggested changes may lead to little value for an organization [16]. Despite much research on barriers for success when implementing and using ITIL [18].

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In order to research barriers for success, few have included the employees perspective in their data collection methods. This lack of literature on whether IT employees perceive the effects that ITIL has on their organization shows that existing literature may have missed important details regarding successfactors. Therefore, the employee perspective needs to be taken into account in order to validate existing research on how to achieve ITIL success and discover new topics for further research. Based on this, this paper will explore the following research questions:

- RQ1: In what way can ITIL affect organizational culture and employees everyday work life?
- RQ2: What does employees believe to be important for successful use of the ITIL framework?

This paper will investigate the use of ITIL in Norwegian organizations and address several topics such as possible cultural implications, software and certification courses. The rest of this paper is structured as follows: First we discuss existing literature, the methodology, before continuing on to findings, conclusion and suggestions for further research is given at the end.

2 Background

When focusing on ITSM concepts, it is important to separate between the terms framework and standard. While a standard is a set of clearly defined rules, a framework is recognized as guidelines which suggests "what to do" rather than specific rules on "how to do it" [20]. When implementing ITIL, businesses can choose parts of the framework and adapt it to their business strategy. As shown in Figure 1, ITIL is described in five core publications known as the service lifecycle.

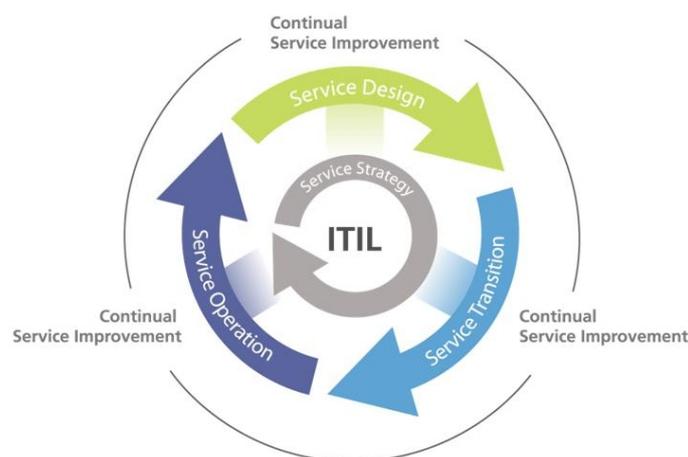


Figure 1: ITIL lifecycle from HALIMBUS [12]

The five stages are: *Service Strategy*: plan and goal setting, *Service Design*: design architecture which align IT plans with business goals, *Service Transition*: testing services before use, *Service Operation*: daily services are managed and monitored and *Continual Service Improvement*: continuously maintain and improve existing services.

When using ITIL, the most cited factor for success is management commitment. However, in 2015, Iden and Eikebrokk[3] concluded that organizational commitment and

group efficiency could be considered equally, if not more paramount for successful use of the framework. To explore this further, a short literature overview was performed in order to map whether the employee perspective was taken into consideration when collecting data on how ITIL can affect organizational culture.

Keyword	Scholar	JStor	Bibsys	Total number of hits:
ITIL	1 420	17	393	1830
ITIL AND work culture	3 370	17	4	3391
ITIL AND employee	2 350	9	43	2402
ITIL + IT staff	4 530	17	40	4587
ITIL + barriers	1 580	1	4	1585
ITIL + success	5 820	12	66	5898

Table 1: Overview over the results from the literature search

The literature mapping shown in Table 1, show that overall ITIL success is the most frequently used keyword in literature. It has the most evenly distributed number of hits when comparing the different academic databases. The second most used keyword are IT staff. However, the results emerging from the different keywords provided a great number of irrelevant papers. It was therefore important to filter out papers based on title, abstract or conclusion to find interesting articles and papers. The results showed that despite IT staff being a frequently used word, when investigating the data collection approach, very few have made attempts at inquiring IT staff, employees themselves.

3 Methodology

Based on the literature study in the previous section, gathering data from employees working in a IT department was a key aim further. Therefore, a combination of two data collection methods was used: focus groups and a survey. First, focus group sessions were completed with nine participants in total to provide a foundation for further exploration. Next, based on the results from the focus groups, a survey was distributed to employees in various organizations, both in the public and private sector in Norway.

Focus groups

Focus groups is a quantitative interview process often used in fields like marketing in order to design concepts, products or services [14]. Focus groups was used to gain an understanding of how the ITIL framework has affected employees everyday work life.

Focus groups were used to find inspiration for themes to include in the survey and aimed to gather information from employees who used ITIL on a daily basis. Therefore, the questions were designed to keep the discussion free-flowing to stimulate the forming of new questions. As recommended by Pihl [14], the guide did not exceed 10 questions in order to avoid imposition on the participant's time. The participants consisted of IT employees from three different firms and the sessions explored different themes such as the use of software, the participant's knowledge level regarding the framework and its possible impact on the organizational culture.

Survey

After completing the focus group sessions, a survey was distributed through the itSMF member database which included 2659 mail addresses. Although the group of recipients

were large, a total of 134 recipients completed the survey. Even though themes like organizational culture can be explored in-depth using qualitative methods, it is also possible to gain insight on cultural factors using quantitative methods as well. Therefore, questions inspired by Kanungo et al. [9], where respondents may choose between predefined categories in order to describe culture were used. The survey was also adapted to the possibility that respondents with varying knowledge on ITIL and its processes could provide answers. Meaning, respondents were not required to have a specific relationship towards ITIL, but rather the principles and processes they use in their work. The survey included themes such as:

General knowledge on ITIL

Described by Cater-Steel et al.[2] to be important for successful ITIL implementations. In addition, education may describe what kind of knowledge-base that exists in organizations.

Software and digital tools

According to Langeland[10] and Lunde[13], the decision of which tool or software to use is one of the most important factors to a successful ITIL implementation.

Organizational culture

Findings from the research by Kanungo et al. [9] provided inspiration for categories to describe cultural types. The respondents where therefore asked to describe how ITIL affected the organizational culture using these categories.

Communication

Communication is an essential part of organizational culture. Therefore it helps to answer RQ 1 and uncover how ITIL has affected how the employees communicate within the organization

ITIL and its effect on everyday work life

According to Fung[4], there exist a lack of research on how ITIL affect employees work life. This theme aims to add more research on this.

ITIL success

The respondents have the opportunity to describe important success factors and barriers for success, that they consider relevant for ITIL adoption processes.

Although isolating the coherence between the implementation of ITIL and cultural change is difficult [5]. The use of predefined categories inspired by Kanungo et al. [9] may help to identify what kind of cultural types have emerged with the use of ITIL.

Some of these categories include: hierarchical, procedural, regulated and structured for identifying beurocratic cultures. When identifying innovative and supportive cultures, the following categories were provided to the respondents: result-oriented, risk-taking, creative, pressured, social, supportive,safe and collaborative.

Next, the findings from the focus group sessions and the survey will be presented and discussed. In addition, the research questions mentioned during the introduction are answered.

4 Findings

The findings from the focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using open coding, during which two themes emerged which will further help answer the reserach questions presented earlier in this paper.

RQ1: In what way can ITIL affect organizational culture and employees everyday work life?

The findings showed that respondents considered their workday to be more structured which provided more predictability regarding workflow and decision-making. This implies that benefits already documented in literature were considered positive changes. Similar to the study by Iden and Eikebrokk [7], the results uncovered that positive changes such as clear roles and assignments for employees are existing benefits when using ITIL.

When asked if the introduction of ITIL was a positive change to the business, a majority of respondents agreed while 33 percent disagreed. When comparing the results based on industry sector as the differentiator, 82 percent of private sector respondents and 52 percent of public sector respondents agreed that the framework has promoted positive changes to the business.

Table 2: Frequently selected cultural categories

Category	Percentage
Procedural	65 %
Regulated	58 %
Result-oriented	50 %
Collaborative	49 %

As shown in Table 2, the results from the survey revealed that "procedural" was the most frequently selected category when the respondents were asked what kind of cultural changes had occurred with the use of ITIL in their organization. Both procedural and regulated are categories used to describe a bureaucratic culture, while result-oriented and collaborative are representative of innovative and cooperative cultures. Using the results from the focus groups to supplement this finding, it was stated by the majority of participants that ITIL supported processes was sometimes experienced as both slow and demanding. This was for example emphasized by Respondent 1 who felt that small problems could take much more time than necessary:

It is very rigid, the business has become more cumbersome [...] We aren't able to solve problems as fast (R1).

This may indicate that employees considered the framework to be rigid and respondents reported that solving incidents quickly often became more cumbersome. Lawler and Worley[11] argued that too much imposed formalization can cause less flexibility and increase the rigidity of an organization. However, despite the fact that ITIL has led to an increase in procedures to take into account, the majority of respondents disagreed that the framework proved a hindrance to their work. In fact, the findings imply that although the framework results in processes being more time consuming, positive effects originating from the increase in formalization were prominent as well.

Work life

Contributing to a lack of research on work satisfaction by Fung[4] proved to be difficult, the majority of respondents stated that ITIL has little implication on whether their work is enriching. Despite this, the findings showed that a predictable, service oriented and cooperative work environment were motivating factors. Although previous research by Hauge [5] has indicated that ITIL contributes to a more service oriented organizational

culture, we add that this is also likely to be influenced by individuals, their own motivation, job satisfaction and the organizational culture itself.

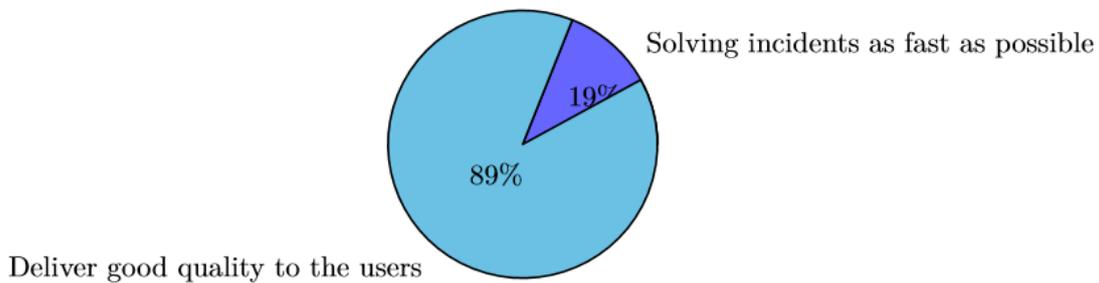


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who prioritize delivering good quality

As Herzberg[6] shifted the focus from material rewards and their psychological impact, making the job enriching and interesting has become increasingly important in the world of changing technology. As shown in Figure 2, findings the survey showed that respondents prioritized delivering good quality to customers and receiving good feedback, which are clearly factors that are important for a motivating work life and may contribute to becoming more result oriented as well (as shown in table 3).

Further, findings also showed that it was perceived as unmotivating for the employees when management focused on statistics and increased pressure on employees to document incidents in greater detail.

Communication

As communication can be considered one of the most critical factors for well-functioning organizations [8, p 278], the participants were asked to describe how communicational processes has changed with the introduction of ITIL. Since table 2 showed that “collaborative” was a frequently selected category, this may indicate that the framework has positive effects on communication and collaboration in organizations.

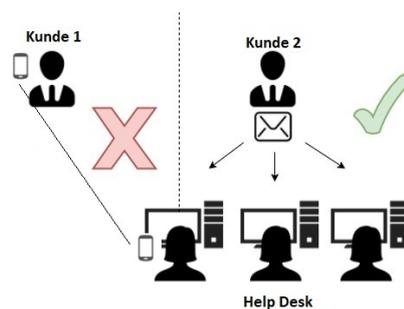


Figure 3: Customers calling directly rather than using the service desk system

Although the respondents agreed that the use of ITIL terminology could help create a “unifying effect” in the sense of the use of a common language in the IT department. Employees in the IT department could feel misunderstood by others in other departments. The results from the survey emphasized that few agree that ITIL had caused any positive changes regarding communication, both between colleagues and between employees and

customers. Hence, it is still uncertain whether the framework has had any specific positive effects on communication in organizations.

During the focus group sessions, a majority of participants reported cases where the frameworks guidance's were not followed. As shown in Figure 3, examples included cases where customers contacted or called someone they knew directly rather than follow standard procedure and contact the service desk. Respondent 3 explained that:

Customers often call directly [...] This is probably because they know they can get help faster. We are told to say "no" and ask them to go through the system instead but that is not always easy (R3).

This was also confirmed in the survey results, where 81 percent recognized that this was a reoccurring incident. When avoiding the ITIL supported processes in this way, may result in a lack of documentation.

Iden and Eikebrokk[7] claimed that clarified roles is a considerable benefit with the ITIL framework. This aligns with the findings from both the survey and focus group sessions, where 77 percent of respondents thought that the predicability, standarization of work tasks and roles were considered positive changes after implementing the framework.

Despite this, a majority of respondents reported issues with unfulfilled roles and process owners in the organization. Examples included that if a critical process owner quits her job, all related processes associated with that role disappears as well. This could cause increased confusion on who is responsible for what and shows that even though ITIL provides clarified roles, it is not always the case that those can be maintained.

RQ2: What does employees believe to be important for successful use of the ITIL framework?

When asked about ITIL success factors, the findings from this study showed that the respondents prioritized the following:

Lack of management commitment

According to Shaibbudin, Ayat, Sharifi et al. [18], lack of management commitment is a common barrier for successful ITIL adoptions. Similary, the findings from the survey and focus groups uncovered that employees considered management commitment to be the most critical factor for ITIL success. One example that emerged from the focus groups, were stated by Respondent 2:

ITIL is a framework with clear structures [...] it is not clearly understood by management which prevents case-flow and efficient sharing of information (R2).

In this case, managers may have lacked the knowledge or motivation to make correct decisions when implementing the framework. Or they were not committed to improve and adapt the framework continuously after the implementation.

Lack of employee training

According to A. Cater-Steel, M. Toleman, and Q. Toowoomb[2], education and knowledge on ITIL is essensial for preperaing employees for the workplace. This was supported by the findings from the survey and focus groups, where lack of employee training was an important barrier for success. The respondents had varying knowledge on ITIL and it was often stated that employees were sent to complete ITIL certification courses when the frameworks implementation process

was at the starting phase. However, a common opinion from the respondents was that these courses were highly dominated by theoretical information and thus provided employees with little knowledge on how to use the framework in practice. The findings from the focus groups also revealed that employees considered education to be more beneficial for managers or process owners.

Organizational culture

An immature organizational culture was the third most frequently stated reason for unsuccessful ITIL implementations, which may suggest a lack of cultural fit between the organizational culture and ITIL. As suggested by Rance [16], the framework must be considered a full organizational change which requires that both IT and business is culturally supported throughout the organization to maintain sustainability [1]. Culture is a well-documented cause for unsuccessful changes in organizations and a common reason in recent years is the introduction of formalization and new technologies. During the focus group session, participants described that the workday could potentially be better without the use of ITIL. With ITIL increasing procedures and formalization in organizations, this could be a potential reason for rejection.

Too much time to implement

A majority of respondents considered the ITIL framework to be a time consuming process to fully implement. Although it is a well-known phenomenon that organizational changes often take a lot of time, Sahibbudin, Ayat, Sharifi et al [18] emphasized that among several factors, lack of realistic goal setting, work instruction and issues with time are common barriers for ITIL success. These may be factors which affect each other, such as lack of time management could be caused by unrealistic goal setting.

Software

Lastly, when asked about ITIL supported software and its impact on the employees everyday work, the majority of respondents were unsure if they were satisfied. The findings implied that employees were neutrally satisfied and only 23 percent stated to be dissatisfied. When asked to state reasons for dissatisfaction, the three most common themes were as follows:

1. Slow system
2. Complicated system
3. Lack of adaption to the way the employees work.

Slow and complicated system can be viewed as two factors originating from the same cause. In the sense that if the system is slow, it is likely that it is complicated as well. This may create a situation where it becomes easier for employees to resort to other tools like e-mail in order to work faster.

The software which was used by respondents often consisted of the proper functionality and was claimed to be adapted to the routines of the organization. Despite this, it often lacked a user friendly interface and was often perceived as too complex to perform simple tasks quickly. Therefore respondents were "forced" to adapt themselves to the software rather than the other way around. This could potentially cause a lack of motivation to use the software and encourage employees to use other tools such as mail to do their work faster and weaken the effect of the ITIL framework in terms of documenting following the suggested procedures. Therefore when choosing ITIL supported software, employees should be involved in the decision making.

5 Conclusion

This paper has confirmed previous findings from literature and several barriers for ITIL success. Similar to existing research, respondents reported that the organizations had achieved more predictability in work tasks and clearer roles. However some improvement may be necessary in order to further the positive effects. Employees frequently described manager's concern with statistics. Managers should consider lowering the standards, increase their understanding for what is necessary to document and involve employees in the process to make documenting a easier. Although ITIL provided clear roles, several respondents reported that some roles were unfilled. For example, if one person with an important role quit, the related processes would disappear as well. This may impact communication in businesses. Lack of software adaptability was also a reoccurring issue and employees therefore resorted to other tools to do their work. This could also cause unmotivation and result in a lack of documentation. Therefore, including employees when choosing software should be regarded as important for businesses who uses ITIL to avoid dissatisfaction.

Lack of management commitment during and after the implementation are considerable barriers for successful ITIL implementations. Managers also need to adapt the processes to support the organization, include employees in decision making and increase their awareness / understanding of the ITIL framework. The findings also showed that respondents considered ITIL courses to include too much theoretical knowledge. This implies that ITIL educational courses need to be adjusted to make it easier for employees and managers to understand ITIL on a more practical level.

Limits and future research

According to Rashotte [17] individuals can make changes to their feelings, behavior and opinions by interacting with others. In this context, ITIL experts are likely to interact and share opinions with each other, furthermore more likely to have a stronger and positive standpoint regarding ITIL than employees. This topic has not been thoroughly investigated in this paper, but could be interesting to explore further.

Lastly, it is important to note, considering the small data sample, that this study may not be enough to represent and answer the research questions in a complete manner and lacks sufficient grounds to create a clear contrast from previous research. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted with a larger population to validate the results from this paper.

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