



## ITSM and ITIL: An Art vs. a Science?

During a recent discussion concerning IT Service Management, a colleague asked, “Do you consider ITIL to be an art or a science?” I needed a moment to adjust my thinking. My first thought was it was a rhetorical question. On the other hand, it was an interesting one. It could prove enlightening not so much in obtaining an answer but in the process of finding one.

But why pay this question such consideration? Considering that not a day goes by where I do not hear about some one or some organization that is thinking about, asking questions, getting training or implementing ITIL, where I used to consider the question to be more relevant and appropriate, I consider it to be necessary. At the heart of the answer might lay, more than an understanding, but an appreciation for what both ITIL and ITSM are and are not, how they relate, and what it takes to implement them successfully.

Based on accepted definitions; science is having knowledge of, a state of knowing, a knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws as obtained and tested by scientific method whereas an art is the conscious use of skill and imagination. From this one can conclude that ITIL clearly falls in the realm of a science while IT Service Management could justifiably be considered an art.

The particulars of these perspectives around them can and usually does have a major impact on leveraging ITIL to achieve the benefits of effective IT Service Management. Misconceptions around them are in all probability the leading cause for many initiatives in this area to fail.

Let's consider some definitive principles, attributes and guidelines for each as a science and an art.

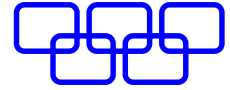
**Knowledge in the science of ITIL does not ensure proper implementation nor guarantee achieving benefits from it** – this is a leading misconception most organizations face when considering ITIL. Typically organizations get as many of the staff trained and possibly certified in ITIL and then attempt to implement it with the expectation that those personnel know enough about it to effectively work with and adapt to it. Implementation of a science is difficult and without an innate set of measurable metrics upon which success and benefits can be proven. Typically the level of effectiveness and benefit gained from the implementation of ITIL both tactically and strategically is more appropriately determined by how well the ITIL framework is leveraged in IT Service Management and how effectively IT Service Management is implemented.



**IT Service Management plays a critical role in the level and degree of success in achieving benefit from an ITIL implementation** – While ITIL has the capability to provide enormous benefit, it is in the application of ITIL, not ITIL itself, where benefits are found and success is achieved. Although it might seem like an obvious point, consider that ITIL is a prescribed process oriented framework with clearly defined procedural steps to achieving best practices. ITIL has strong, somewhat synergistic, inter-relationships and dependencies in people, organization, and technology and is focused on managing IT. It is worth considering all these other perspectives clearly fall in the realm of the art of IT Service Management dealing with how ITIL is leveraged externally to IT. That being said, IT Service Management can be viewed as the art of applying the knowledge of science of ITIL with a specific context and focus. Whereas ITIL is a framework for management of IT with best practice processes, IT Service Management is an approach that combines proven methods such as process management and known industry best practices to enable any organization to deliver quality IT services that satisfy customer business needs and achieve performance targets specified within service level agreements. It is the effective use of this process framework in addition to people, technology, and information perspectives that will help ensure alignment of business requirements and enable IT service provisioning.

**The scope and perspective of ITIL and IT Service Management is complimentary however ITIL is micro focused internally to IT and IT Service Management is macro focused externally to business** – One could make a case that an ITIL framework is a set of best practices for managing an IT infrastructure while IT Service Management is combining the use of that framework with people, process, technology and information perspectives to delivery quality IT services cost effectively that satisfy business needs driven by requirements. The question then becomes one of scope, focus and applicability that does not emphasize on what something is but more on how it is applied. ITIL as a framework for managing IT which is the “what” and IT Service Management is the “how” to leverage ITIL to achieve IT and business alignment.

**Several critical success factors of aligning Business to IT and ensuring an effective Continuous Service Improvement Program lie heavily in IT Service Management** – Areas such as information (measurements, metrics, reports), organization (culture and maturity), integration factors that deal directly with business and IT alignment as well as Governance, Security, Controls, Compliance, Quality and Risk Management, Knowledge Management, Project/Program/Portfolio Management all relate to IT service provisioning and are driven by business. These are clearly aligned with the art of applying IT Service Management knowledge and experience whereas the science of ITIL is best applied to managed IT within this context.



## Conclusion

Oftentimes the difference between art and science is in knowing how to apply the science. This includes knowing the finer nuances such as where the individual components separate, what the differences are, where similarities lie, and what are the inter-dependencies and the proper inter-relationship between them.

Areas such as cooperation, coordination, communication, and commitment play a critical role in effective IT Service Management. IT Service Management is the initiative that will ultimately leverage the ITIL framework for managing IT across the enterprise and bring it into alignment with the needs of the business. ITIL cannot do it alone. So although the science needs to be employed in its proper measure and fashion, its successful propagation is articulated by the art. Therefore, where practitioners are necessary for the science of ITIL, artists are required to reach its goals and achieve its benefits.

What separate the practitioner from the artist are their approach, their scope, purpose and the application of their knowledge and experience. For one it is one who practices the science within a pre-determined scope while the other considers it the use of the science to be combined with knowledge and experience to be used as the "how to" to accomplish objectives and purpose. This leads the artist to be more aligned with a belief system and therefore is much more effective at how well in a holistic sense the application of the science addresses needs to ensure subsequent satisfaction is satisfied.

In closing one final observation could be made. The enduring benefits of ITIL might just be how it pushed the focus and necessity for IT Service Management to the forefront, how to effectively align business and IT, and the need for experienced practitioners ("artists") to make its science a reality.