Using A Process-Oriented Architecture To Improve IT Service Delivery

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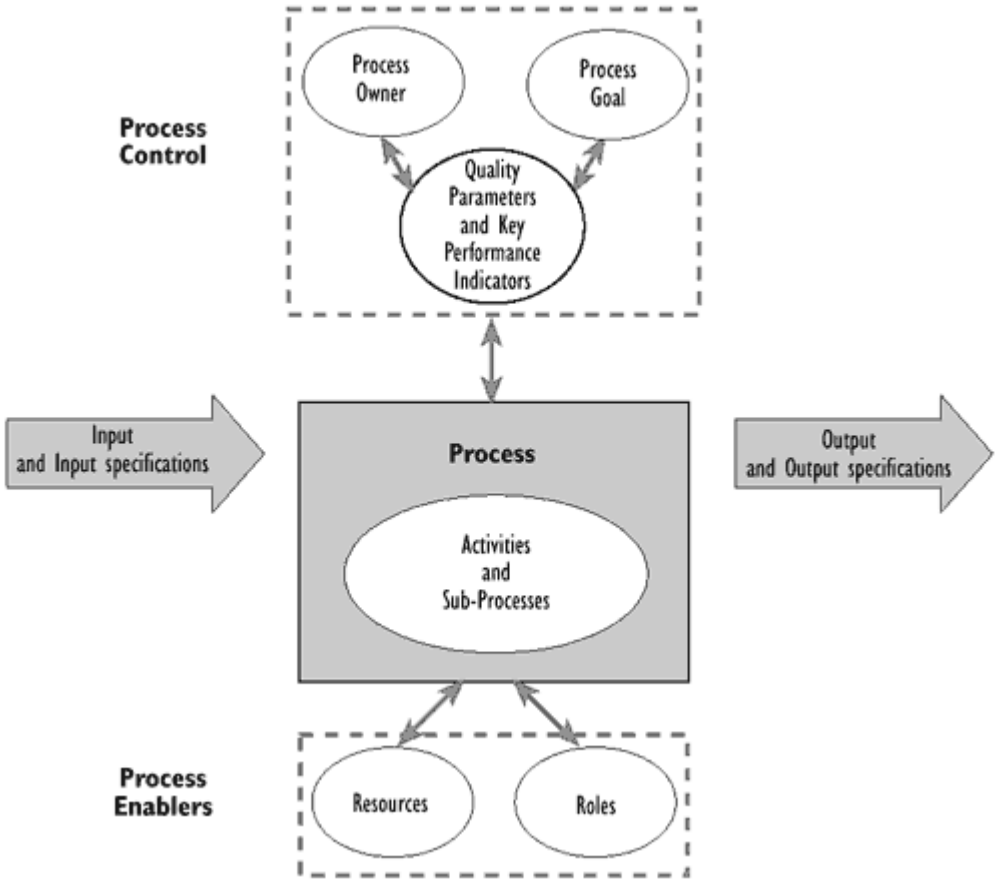
An IT organization needs clearly defined and documented processes in order to operate more efficiently in today's fast-paced and complex world. The processes also need to be connected and working together; but, having a process framework requires a thorough understanding of the components of a generic process as well as understanding how processes can help an IT organization perform better and deliver quality services to the business.

Let's begin by defining "process" and discussing the "generic process model" as an introduction to ITIL processes.

A process can be defined as a connected series of related actions and activities performed by agents with the intent of satisfying a purpose or achieving a goal. Process control can similarly be defined as the process of planning and regulating, with the objective of performing the process in an effective and efficient way. Once processes are defined and under control, they can be repeatable and manageable.

The figure below shows the main components of a generic process.



Generic Process Model

Let's discuss the various components of a process:

Every ITIL process must have an **owner**. The owner is the "go-to" person: the one accountable for the development, implementation and continuous improvement of the process. The process owner is also focused on reviewing and improving interfaces and dependencies with other Service Management processes. The owner of an ITIL process must be high up enough in the organization to influence those who will be working within the process. Be sure everyone in the organization knows who each process owner is.

Every process must have a **goal.** The goal tells us the purpose of the process and what we are trying to accomplish with this process. The goal helps develop the critical success factors (CSFs).

Once we have our goal, we need a way to measure our success and progress in reaching it. We use our **quality parameters and key performance indicators** to do this. A key performance indicator (KPI) is a measurable quantity against which specific performance criteria can be set when drawing up the Service Level Agreement (SLA). There are four categories of KPIs:

1. Compliance - Are we doing it?
2. Quality - How well are we doing it?
3. Performance - How fast or slow are we doing it?
4. Value - Are we making a difference to the business?

The KPIs are our metrics. We will use the metrics at regular intervals or checkpoints along the way so we know if we are on the right path to reach our goals. They tell us whether or not the CSFs have been achieved. Each CSF should have several supporting KPIs, but it is recommended that the focus should be on a small, balanced sub-set of CSFs and KPIs at any given time.

Input (data) comes from other processes which is processed by the **activities and sub-processes** producing **output** which should be measured and reviewed to make sure the output is a result of the goal of the process. Also, remember that the output of one process is used as input by other processes

Process activities may already exist in many IT organizations, but they are without the process coordination required for full effectiveness. The main issues that exist without a fully developed process-oriented architecture include:

- The activities are not standardized and repeatable
- The activities may be done with inconsistent approaches
- Important activities may be missing
- Lack of focus on business-oriented results

Supporting everything are the process enablers: **resources** and **roles.** "Resources" are things like people, money, hardware, software, etc. "Roles" means the role played by each of the various resources.

Starting Out

Now that there is a basic understanding of the generic process, you need to figure out where to start. One way to start is to ask "the four questions." These are questions that an IT organization should ask itself regularly, based on your company's high level business objectives and vision:

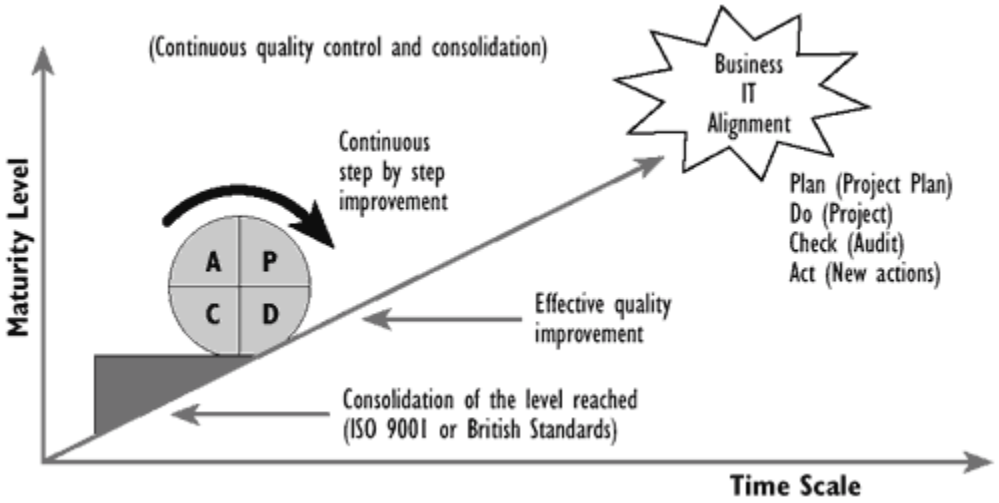
1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to be?
3. How do we get there?
4. Are we there yet? (Have we arrived? Have we improved?)

Figuring out where you are requires an assessment. The assessment can be done by yourself or with the help of a consultant with experience assessing IT organizations. Once you know where you are, you then create goals/objectives which become "where you want to be." Deciding on how to get there means implementing process improvement plans to help reach your goals. Knowing when you have improved is only possible if you are measuring and tracking your progress throughout.

Once you are done with the four questions, you start again with a new assessment and continue through all these steps. Continual improvement must also be a part of process design.

Continual Improvement

Once a process is designed, implemented and working, you must build in continual improvement within every process. One of the most common methods of continual improvement entails using the Deming Cycle. W. Edwards Deming (1900-1993) was an economist who developed fourteen points of attention designed to help improve products. Deming's simple method for improving utilized his model called the Deming Cycle.



The Deming Cycle

Deming said that an IT organization should be striving for the ultimate goal of aligning itself with the business; but, rather than create a large ponderous project to reach that goal, he said utilizing a series of small projects is the best way to get to the ultimate goal. Each of the small projects should be using the four steps of Plan, Do, Check, Act:

- Plan – create a project plan
- Do – do the project
- Check – audit your progress along the way
- Act – take new actions or adjustments if the audit reveals gaps

After each cycle of improvement, consolidation of the level reached should take place to prevent "the ball from rolling back downhill." The cycle itself was referred to as "effective quality improvement" by Deming.

Summary

The bottom line is that well defined processes are needed for IT to operate efficiently, and having a good plan for continually improving the processes is essential if the IT organization hopes to meet and exceed the needs of the business.

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1. *The Implementation Road Map For IT Service Management* provides IT professionals with a thorough understanding of all the critical success factors required to build and execute implementation plans for an improved IT Service Management operation.

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