Five Critical Questions for Choosing an ITIL Service Provider

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Look for a track record of experience and good governance

In working with major customers worldwide, HP sees a trend in the office of the CIO. As companies structure IT to align with business strategy and achieve better business outcomes, CIOs are increasingly looking to partner with multiple IT service providers to leverage best-of-breed capabilities.

We've learned that while CIOs enjoy the benefit of working with multiple service providers, they also require the highest levels of quality service. In a multi-sourced environment, disciplined and rigorous governance is critical so that all parties work with established and coordinated mechanisms, linking IT and business objectives to measurable results.

The primary mechanisms guiding the implementation of governance are best practices from the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), drawn from the public and private sectors internationally. It is supported by a comprehensive qualifications scheme, accredited training organizations, and implementation and assessment tools.

Customer interest in implementing ITIL is definitely on the rise. For example, executives from the IT Service Management Forum (itSMF) project that the number of companies adopting ITIL in the U.S. alone could grow to about 75% by 2007. Forrester Research projects that 80% of global 2,000 companies will adopt the framework by 2010.

Interest in IT Service Management (ITSM) is growing as well. As companies identify and support IT services that are critical to enterprise business process, they also need to improve service quality with real-time information about IT impact on service level agreements. Then, they need to understand how to optimize service support. This mission-critical management is delivered through ITSM solutions that enable CIOs to run IT as a service delivery business.

Choosing carefully

ITIL and ITSM service providers should provide a proven approach to governance and best practices in a multi-sourced, IT environment. Enterprises require a structured IT governance model to be more effective at synchronizing IT strategies to align with business goals.

Below are five critical questions for vendors:

1. What experience do you have working in a multi-sourced IT environment?

Managing an assembly of outsourcing partners can be time-consuming, complex and expensive. You want a partner that can communicate with you and your partners to ensure the job gets done right. In addition, the vendor must be able to resolve conflicts, adapt to changing business conditions and work toward common business and IT goals.

2. Are your engineers ITIL trained and certified?

Does the vendor truly have the capability to implement ITIL-based best practices and ITSM? To be ITIL-certified at the manager level, the highest current level of certification, an IT engineer must undergo rigorous training that includes lectures, exercises and exams. ITIL certificates signify a solid understanding of best practices for ITSM that can be applied immediately.

3. What ITSM solutions do you offer (i.e., design services, management software, education and training)?

Your IT organization is measured on the quality and costs of the IT services you provide for your company's business. Can your service provider help effectively manage the people, processes, and technology that impact IT operations?

4. What experience do you have in implementing ITSM programs for customers?

A service provider experienced in implementing ITSM programs can leverage its deep knowledge in ITIL to save time and money and put you on the right track to adapt to change. Poorly planned IT processes can undermine an organization's effectiveness. Surprisingly, an estimated 80% of unplanned downtime results from people and process issues.

5. Can you provide a holistic solution to ITIL and ITSM?

Certain IT vendors can design and implement ITIL, but not many have the full capability to provide a complete solution. An evaluation of your ITIL needs that's disjointed with the actual implementation may hamper your end-goal of aligning IT services with business needs. And once processes are implemented, they should be assessed and improved over time.

Look for a vendor that can provide a comprehensive solution to help design, build, manage and continually improve a first-rate IT service operation.

As any CIO in a multi-sourced organization can tell you, active governance is vital to running a smooth-operating IT engine. If the goal of IT is to align with business strategy, then having a solid governance structure in place is a key step toward achieving that goal.

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