

Integrating Continual Service Improvement into the Service Lifecycle

By [Janet Kuhn](#)



Something seems to be missing from the *Continual Service Improvement (CSI)* volume of ITIL v3; ITIL guidance.

Service Strategy, Service Design, Service Transition and Service Operation each lay out guidance on specific processes, functions and roles that take place within that Lifecycle domain. However, a review of CSI's Table of Contents reveals little in the way of specific IT guidance.

Maybe the authors of ITIL v3 should have integrated the concepts of Continual Service Improvement into the processes of the other IT Service Lifecycle domains.

It seems to make a lot of sense. The new ITIL Service Lifecycle focuses on Service Strategy at its core, circumnavigated by the continuum of Service Design, Service Transition and Service Operation. Wrapping around the whole Service Lifecycle, like a security blanket, is Continual Service Improvement (CSI).

Industry, especially manufacturing, has long recognized the benefits of continual process improvement. Much literature abounds on the subject, and the ITIL CSI book does a creditable job of synthesizing its standard principles, processes, methods and techniques.

What follows is a practical approach for actually integrating CSI concepts into the rest of the IT Service Lifecycle.

The Continual Service Improvement volume of ITIL's version 3 defines a very simple 7-step approach to implementing CSI:

1. Define what you should measure
2. Define what you can measure
3. Gather the data
4. Process the data
5. Analyze the data
6. Present and use the information
7. Implement corrective action

However, if it followed the format of the other new OGC books, it would have aggregated some of the CSI processes together and given them a fancy new ITIL name – perhaps something like “Operation Improvement Management” or “Incident Improvement Management.”

However, CSI differs from the other books. It presents the classic concepts of Continual Service Improvement, couples them with the guidance laid out in the other ITIL books, and relies upon the reader's knowledge of the other Lifecycle domains to apply them in the proper perspective; in other words, “some assembly required.”

There are essentially three approaches to CSI within ITIL:

- Service approach
- Lifecycle approach
- Functional group approach

Service Approach – Alleviating Points of Pain

One of the most common ways of bringing CSI into the Service Lifecycle is when you need to fix a service that is not achieving its desired results.

If you have already implemented Service Level Management (SLM), this may be part of a Service Improvement Plan (SIP) to restore agreed levels of service to an offering that is not meeting its targeted service levels. If you are still working on maturing your SLM processes, this may be a service that is generating those pain points that keep you awake at night.

The Service Approach applies Continual Service Improvement disciplines to measure and improve an end-to-end service. For example, you would use the CSI Service Approach to improve a failing e-mail service.

To start, you may find yourself setting “negative” targets; that is, fewer disruptions or shorter downtimes. As you bring the service under control, you will then be positioned to experience the true power of continuous process improvement and use CSI’s principles to drive the service to a higher level of quality.

Lifecycle Approach – Turning Experience into Knowledge

As your organization begins to adopt the ITIL Lifecycle, there will be opportunity to define improvements in the interactions of the Lifecycle domains, such as Service Design-to-Service Transition and Service Transition-to-Service Operation. The Lifecycle approach measures the handoffs between each domain and identifies opportunities to improve them.

For example, Service Transition consumes many IT resources, as change is now a way of life in both business and IT. Use CSI to measure the success of your Release and Deployment Management processes. Bringing those processes under control so that you consistently release a good quality product into the live infrastructure means that you can say good riddance to “all hands” fire-alarm exercises and assign your staff to more mission-critical projects.

After the service is operational, the improvement opportunities swing around full circle with opportunities to determine whether the service is fulfilling the strategy defined in Service Strategy. This is also the place where CSI can help determine whether Service Strategy has identified the right strategies.

Functional Group Approach – A Point Solution

Sometimes you can trace an IT service shortfall to a very specific source; for example, an individual department that is not living up to its potential. Although in the long run it is desirable to look at services in an end-to-end manner, it is often more expedient to correct smaller problems that are more visible before you tackle a larger, more complex service.

This is also an excellent way to bring formalized Continual Service Improvement processes into the organization. Pilot CSI first within a smaller functional group, then roll it out to the larger environment.

Adding CSI Roles

CSI is descriptive about roles, however, and recommends the appointment of a CSI Manager who will be accountable for all improvement activities across IT and the Service Lifecycle. The Service Owners of the other ITIL Service Lifecycle processes join the CSI Service Manager in their capacities as holding accountability and responsibility for the success of their individual processes.

Ferretting Out the Details

Unless you are the newly appointed CSI Process Manager, clear some space on your desk for two books. Open up the book that documents your process of interest; for example, Service Operation if you are an Incident Manager. Then, open up the Continual Service Improvement book.

Read the CSI book so that you understand the concepts of Continual Service Improvement. Start reading the other ITIL book. Every place that it says “monitor,” “measure,” “improve,” etc., refer to the CSI book. That is where you will find the guidance that puts your process of interest on the track of Continual Service Improvement.

Concluding Thoughts

The Continual Service Improvement volume is different from the other ITIL books. For the most part, the ITIL community has rolled

easily into the Service Lifecycle and is adopting its new terms like Event Management, Request Fulfillment, and Service Portfolio Management.

Unless you are a newcomer to Continual Service Improvement, you will find no new terms in the CSI book. Its value derives from its coupling with the guidance in the other manuals in the Lifecycle.

Use the two manuals together and you will be on your way to a quality IT Service Management Lifecycle implementation. And, along the way, give thanks that the authors chose not to identify yet another set of management processes that you will have to give title to and understand their varying goals and objectives.

Perhaps ITIL v4 will finish the job and fully integrate CSI concepts into the other IT Lifecycle domains.

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