

Community Organization Principles and ITIL

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In the alphabet soup favored by successful IT Service Management (ITSM) organizations today, the IT Infrastructure Library® (ITIL®) describes how ITSM works; CoBIT® enables IT managers to control the IT infrastructure; the Project Management Institute (PMI®) provides project management guidance; Lean Six Sigma builds effectiveness and efficiency; and, the list goes on. What can community organization principles developed a half century ago add to this heady mix?

The common element in all of these, though, is that they rely on the capability of IT and business leaders to manage the needs and desires of both people and corporate cultures as they bring change into an organization.

Classic community organization techniques developed and honed since the 1950s can play an important role in bringing sustainable change into an IT organization. In his book "Community Organization" (Harper & Row, 2nd edition, 1967), one of the leading authors on the subject, Murray G. Ross, wrote:

"Community Organization is a process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, orders (or ranks) those needs or objectives, develops the confidence and will to work at these needs or objectives, finds the resources (internal and/or external) to deal with these needs or objectives, takes action in respect to them, and in so doing extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community."

The essence of this statement as it applies to the IT Service Management (ITSM) community is that successfully bringing change into an organization requires organizational development skills, as well as technical skills.

Ross found that goals can only be achieved if the entire community recognizes them as being important; and a community can only establish goals and objectives if the community has already developed the capability to collaborate and work together toward a specific goal.

Does it sound like an endless circle of frustration? It could be, but fortunately Ross also identified key assumptions about community organizations that can help break out of this vicious circle. Let's take a look at these assumptions and their implications within a typical program to bring ITSM principles into an organization.

Assumptions within Community Organization ¹	Relationship to ITSM Implementation
Communities can develop capacity to deal with their own problems.	By initiating formal ITSM implementation projects and programs, IT groups establish the needed foundation to actively develop the skills and practices for bringing ITSM into the organization.
People want change and can change.	More than any group within an organization, IT has recognized the persistence of change. Key to the acceptance of ITSM as an ad hoc world-wide standard has been its capability to deal with constant change.
People should participate in making, adjusting, or controlling the major changes taking place in their communities.	ITSM best practices embrace the inclusion of representatives from business, as well as various IT disciplines and levels, in developing and implementing change.
Changes in community that are self-imposed or self-developed have meaning and permanence that imposed changes do not.	ITSM best practices are a framework, not a methodology, and each organization implements the parts and processes in ways that are

	appropriate for its business environment.
A "holistic" approach can deal successfully with problems with which a "fragmented" approach cannot cope.	ITSM's focus on relationships between processes and dependencies on other functions within IT and the business breaks down "silos of operation" within IT, and provides critical oversight into managing IT resources in alignment with Business needs.
Democracy requires cooperative participation and action in community affairs and people must learn the skills to make this possible.	ITSM identifies roles, not positions, that work together to achieve the benefits of IT Service Management. The learning track of ITSM certification courses and planning and implementation workshops provides a channel for developing required skills.
Frequently communities need help to organize and deal with needs.	Accredited ITSM training providers, along with organizations offering planning and implementation services can serve as critical catalysts in helping an organization organize its ITSM implementation effort.
¹ Murray G. Ross, <i>Community Organization</i> , "Harper & Row, 2nd. ed.,; 1967, pp 86-93.	

In summary, the path to bringing ITSM into an organization can be shortened and smoothed by adopting some of the principles put forth by the social science community:

- Focus on developing the internal capability within the existing IT organization to maximize the effectiveness of your ITSM implementation program.
- Recognize that change is a way of life, and encourage and nurture the ability of IT staff to accept and produce change.
- Involve a wide spectrum of IT disciplines and users in your implementation plans.
- Involve the entire organization in implementation planning from the start, as the organization will naturally initiate modifications to its existing attitudes and practices as a result of participating in the project.
- Design your implementation plan to accommodate relationships between processes and between IT groups in order to unlock the full potential of IT Service Management.
- Avoid implementing ITSM only in isolated groups or for isolated processes.
- Build participation in the implementation effort by initiating skills and management training programs.
- Finally, bring in outside expertise only where needed to provide objective views and to inject highly focused skills and knowledge as part of your overall plan.

Summary

Bringing sustainable change into an existing organization does not require costly outside resources who are here today and gone tomorrow. Bringing these principles to bear in a Do IT Yourself program can build consensus and momentum to create a successful program.

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