

Service Catalog: Integration = Value

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An all-too-common approach to Service Catalog deployment is to pump a repository full of information – and then hope that it will be useful to someone.

Unfortunately for the do-it-yourself crowd, this technique seems to be most frequently associated with spreadsheets and other home-grown approaches for Service Catalog implementation.

In some cases, it is almost as though the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) definition has been taken too literally: “Service Catalog provides a central source of information on the IT services delivered to the business by the service provider organization.” Yes, the Service Catalog is fundamentally an information source, but simply creating this information repository is not enough to generate value.

What all Service Catalog practitioners should understand well before they move to deployment is that integration – with other tools, processes and data – is the primary method of extracting value from the Service Catalog.

Forming a Base of Knowledge

ITIL v3’s Service Catalog Management process and other ITIL processes are meant to work together and complement one another. In order to meet this objective, the ITIL processes must be able to share information. Introduced in ITIL v3, the Service Knowledge Management System (SKMS) supports this information sharing through a common repository for management processes across all ITIL Service Lifecycle stages, including Service Strategy, Service Design, Service Transition, Service Operation and Continual Service Improvement.

By addressing all of the key information sources throughout the IT management system, the SKMS becomes a highly effective decision support system. The SKMS includes the ITIL v3 Configuration Management System (CMS), itself containing one or more federated Configuration Management Databases (CMDB). It also includes the Service Portfolio, which in turn includes the Service Catalog.

Simply put, the Service Catalog, like other elements of the SKMS, is a critical information repository that has the potential to support and enhance a variety of ITIL processes – that is, if properly integrated.

Value through Integration Today

Based on ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) surveys including hundreds of Service Catalog adopters, it is ITIL v3’s Request Fulfillment process that is most often integrated with Service Catalog implementations today. In fact, automated Request Fulfillment is so closely associated with the Service Catalog that many people talk about them together as if they were the same thing. Yet Request Fulfillment is really a value-added capability that makes the Service Catalog actionable.

A service request expresses the desire from a user to access, gain information, or interact with an IT service in some way. The Request Fulfillment process enables users to issue service requests and receive the corresponding services, results or information. It also assists the service provider – for instance the IT organization within an enterprise – in sourcing, delivering and communicating status information for services.

Of course Request Fulfillment is not the only ITIL process that, through integration, makes the Service Catalog

actionable. Another key process that adds value to the Service Catalog is Incident Management.

An incident is an unplanned disruption or reduction in the quality of an IT service. By using the SKMS to connect the Service Catalog to the Incident Management process through the Service Desk, an understanding of user and business impact can be gained. Service Desk staff can more appropriately prioritize their efforts to restore services to committed levels when able to view service details including service level agreements (SLA), number and type of users, and other information for the impacted service found in the Service Catalog.

The unique needs, priorities, and maturity level of each IT organization should govern which ITIL processes are integrated with the Service Catalog first. As large numbers of IT organizations have shown, Request Fulfillment and Incident Management are worth early consideration when developing a Service Catalog integration roadmap.

At the same time, there are additional ITIL processes to contemplate. IT organizations are in no way discouraged from proceeding with this next set of integrations sooner rather than later. It should simply be noted that more IT organizations have thus far completed integrations with Request Fulfillment and Incident Management.

Value through Integration Tomorrow

Where the Request Fulfillment process is sometimes too closely associated with the Service Catalog, the Service Portfolio and the Service Portfolio Management process should be more closely associated; and not just because the Service Catalog contains the operational subset of the services listed in the Service Portfolio.

The ITIL v3 Service Portfolio Management process provides a mechanism to ensure the right services with the right mix of cost and quality are provided to the business. In concept this is similar to optimizing the value of a financial portfolio where more resources are applied to higher returning investments. The Service Portfolio Management process should also consider the supply and demand aspects of IT services to ensure the operational services in the Service Catalog meet the needs of the business.

When it comes to CMDB or CMS integration, the possibilities for integration and the potential for value are a relatively wide open frontier. As a starting point, the services in the Service Catalog should correspond directly with those in the CMS. However, even this is far from guaranteed in the vast majority of implementations since, based on EMA research, only about 10-15% of Service Catalogs have been integrated with a CMDB.

But in time, with deeper CMS integration, the intelligence of the Service Catalog, along with many of the integrated processes, will increase dramatically. Consider a Service Catalog that dynamically reflects service availability and performance status as aggregated from the many configuration items (CI) representing an end-to-end service in the CMS. Or consider an automated Request Fulfillment process that makes service provisioning decisions based on resource availability, again as shown by the CIs in the CMS.

Summary

The Service Catalog does indeed provide a central source of information on the IT services delivered to the business by the service provider organization. But simply creating this information repository is not enough. Other ITIL processes and components of the SKMS are all useful to enhance the Service Catalog through integration.

Remember, for the Service Catalog, Integration = Value.

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