

CSI Means "Change Standard Investigation?"

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Forgive the pun on the name of the popular television police detective program. However, it appears that ITIL V3's "Continual Service Improvement (CSI)" phase could easily decipher into "Change Standard Investigation" when you use its guidance to help establish Service Transition's Standard Change models and Request Fulfillment process.

Many IT shops across the globe are in the midst of their ITIL journey, and Change Management is often one of the first processes they seek to bring under control. Everyone does Change, and if you do not properly manage it, the downside risks are tremendous.

However, if there is one thing that ITIL Change Management has taught us through its three versions is that you have to understand the costs, both in terms of out-of-pocket expenditures and staff equivalents.

But, if you do not yet have a formal Change Management process, how can you estimate its staff costs? Each change is different, making it difficult to establish a base unit per change.

However, I believe you can accomplish the goal of estimating Change Management costs if you look at the situation from the perspective of ITIL's "Continual Service Improvement (CSI) phase."

First, in order to get better, you have to define how and where you want to get better; that is, you have to establish a baseline for where you are now. Different organizations in different industries will have very different Change Management baselines; i.e., a cell phone service provider may have a very aggressive on-going Change Management program while an organization in a much "slower" industry may have few frequent large-scale infrastructure changes.

The ITIL V3 Continual Service Improvement volume lays out a 7-Step Improvement Process that you could directly apply to estimating the cost of operating Change Management – or any other process. These steps are:

1. Define what you should measure. Step 1 defines (and refines) the data requirements at the beginning of each improvement cycle. The Service Provider asks, "What are the things that should be measured and where is that data found?"

This step establishes the scope of measurement. Are you measuring technical staff time, CAB participation time, project management time or training time, etc? You must understand the components that comprise the service.

2. Define what you can measure. Once you have defined what you want to measure, to what extent can you actually measure it? Step 2 defines your data collection capability. What that means is figuring out what you can actually capture. It documents the availability of various tools, and inventories monitoring capability, reporting tools, and the like to determine the organization's capability to gather the data identified in Step 1.

You may have a time accounting or workflow system or work orders and timesheets that will provide that information, or you may have to resort to the memories (often faulty) of the participants.

3. Gather the data. During Step 3, the actual data gathering takes place. Be careful not to be overwhelmed by all of the data that various tools can provide.

You will need to gather data over time and over many projects. You may already have this information from your existing systems, or you may need to devote some time to gather this information over the coming weeks or months, as appropriate.

4. Process the data. Step 4 processes the data gathered in Step 3, addressing the detail of how to turn the gathered data gathered into something usable. This step also addresses:

- Frequency - How often will you process the data?
- Format - What format best suits the subsequent data analysis step?
- Tools - What tools or systems will you use?
- Quality Assurance - How will you assure the accuracy and integrity of the data?

This step relates the data to various past Change Management projects. You have not analyzed anything yet. You have just put it into appropriate "buckets."

5. Analyze the data. Step 5 analyzes the data collected and processed. Once it is in its desired format, it performs trend analyses, and determines requirements for corrective action. It checks conformance to existing plans against established targets.

This is where you can start to draw conclusions about how much staff time different types of changes require. Expand your thinking to include the impact on staff time of "collateral" damage because you did not have a formal Change Management system in place.

6. Present & use the data. Step 6 turns the data into information and, through use, into wisdom. In other words, the information provides the detail to create reports, and develop action plans, service reviews and evaluations.

Draw up your recommendations. Usually, you will find that you frequently perform some types of changes, which will enable you to define what ITIL terms a 'Standard Change.' A Standard Change is a pre-defined change that is low-risk with well-known and documented tasks and activities.

7. Implement Corrective Action. Step 7 gets things done; it initiates the actions identified through the previous six steps. At this point, the other IT Service Lifecycle phases of Service Strategy, Design, Transition and Operation kick in to design, implement and operate your designated improvements.

Now the 7-Step Improvement Process starts over as you monitor your estimates of Change Management staff involvement to see how accurate they were.

Summary

One of the solutions the 7-Step Improvement process may lead you to is the establishment of a Request Fulfillment process, as described in ITIL V3. You will have already done most of the work that is necessary to identify and define Standard Change models. A Standard Change model will let you move these frequently occurring, low-risk changes out of the direct Change Management process while still executing the proper amount of management control over them.

That leaves the "other" changes. Presumably they are larger and less frequent than Standard Changes. Now that you have removed the Standard Changes from your estimates, it should be easier to highlight the management cost of the other types of changes you handle – and you already know how to use the CSI 7-Step Improvement Process to assist with your planning.