



When Execution Matters

Integrated IT Service Management (ITSM) Solutions April 16, 2010 – 4:30 pm by Vivek Sambasivam

When it comes to aligning people, processes and technology, the IT industry is flooded with buzz words – “integrated,” “federated,” “unified,” “CMDB,” and “location agnostic,” to name a few. This article will de-mystify the jargon by discussing integrated IT Service Management (ITSM) solutions and related concepts.

What is ITSM?

ITSM is a discipline for managing IT systems. The IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) defines and documents the best practices in this area. ITSM enables these best practices by addressing the need to align the delivery of IT services with the needs of the business. ITSM provides the visibility, control and automation needed to deliver quality service, manage risk and compliance, maximize return on investments, and accelerate business growth.

IT Challenges

Due to the current economic climate, IT is under pressure to provide targeted, value-added services for enhancing the operational effectiveness of IT and related business processes. IT departments are expected to maintain the same level of service to business users with more efficient use of resources and lower margins of error. In most cases, getting data in a timely and efficient manner can prove difficult. That’s why more organizations are turning to integrated ITSM solutions to meet cost and efficiency imperatives. The integrated ITSM solution is also one of the key enablers in transforming IT from a support group to a true business service organization.

Business Benefits of Adopting Integrated ITSM Solutions

Better Decision-Making: The need for making informed decisions has never been greater. Managers need to accurately estimate the effectiveness of IT investments for keeping performance on track. Better decisions about availability, cost and efficiencies require access to data that is typically spread across multiple best-of-breed solutions. Business data that is hard to access and use will slow down decision-making to a crawl.

Effective Service Delivery: With the increasing maturity and widespread adoption of process frameworks like those found in the ITIL have helped IT closely align and integrate with the business, integrating different tools together for effective service delivery.

Access to Actionable Information: Organizations today have many tools that provide information about their IT assets. However, what is missing is access to actionable data, where and when it is needed. Though the tools individually are meeting the requirements of the respective business units or functions, there is no common data source that is available to get all the information about a particular asset because the information is stored in different data sources and there is no easy way to access them.

Return on Investment: An integrated service management solution helps organizations maximize return on their existing investments. There are different kinds of integration that can be done – data level integration, integration with other Operational Management Products (OMPs) or process level integration. The integration not only provides one common source for information, but also helps organizations to deliver proactive, on-demand service management.

Multi-Vendor Product Implementation Challenges

Outdated Legacy Systems: Organizations have invested heavily in existing tools and no organization can afford to rip out their old set of tools. Hence, IT managers are looking to integrate in a multiple tool environment.

Lack of Vendor Support: Vendors have made little or no investments in tool integration – most vendors have struggled to integrate their own portfolio of tools. The Big Four vendors have made significant acquisitions in point solutions to complement their ITSM portfolio and have invested most of their time and resources in integrating their own solution portfolio.

Complexity of Integration: The workflows, processes and categorizations involved make integrations very tricky. A large part of the implementation budget of ITSM tools is actually spent upon these integrations. Organizations should be prepared to invest significant time and budget for integration efforts and look to either third party providers or internal staff to get over integration humps. Integration of IT processes and tools itself is a challenge, and it becomes even more complicated with a large number of diverse OMPs from different vendors which are developed at different times. Organizations have to deal with multiple versions, compatibility issues, data formats, and available interfaces. What has helped today in meeting some of these challenges is the use of the Common Information Model (CIM) standards and the federation option in the CMDB.

Challenges of Maintaining ITSM Tools & Technologies

Changing Product Roadmaps: Vendors are continually changing product roadmaps for ITSM tools while offering little help on the integration front. Organizations will need to leverage best practices and process frameworks for standardizing across the entire set of tools of different vendors and must budget early on for the length and complexity of integration efforts.

Shifting Internal Environment: Fluctuating business demands, increasing complexity of technology, multiple IT regulatory compliance requirements and finite IT budgets all pose significant challenges for businesses to efficiently manage their ITSM application portfolio. Today, IT departments are no longer viewed as mere cost centers but are rather expected to operate as a business unit. IT not only provides the technology but the services and metrics required to support the business goals of the company. Due to the increased dependency on IT departments, upkeep of ITSM applications is highly critical for an organization's success.

Outsourcing and Tools Considerations

Leverage Best Practices: When organizations look at their internal resources and vendor firms for integration expertise, IT managers realize the need for extra help in best-of-breed tool integrations. By leveraging what other organizations have accomplished, IT managers can quickly improve visibility into their IT Service Management portfolio.

Select the Right Partner: Third party service providers have significant expertise in best of breed tool integrations and are a natural partner for complex service management integration efforts. Choosing the right partner is as important as choosing the appropriate ITSM tool to buy. It is imperative to pick the right partner with a fine blend of business, process and technical expertise to integrate all the tools in your ITSM portfolio.

Select the Right Tool: Getting the tool up and running is 10 percent of the battle. There is no long-term value unless the tool is able to work with other tools in your environment. A mediocre tool that integrates well with other tools in your environment is better than a great tool that lacks such integration capabilities.

Implement Value-Rich Solutions: Unlike traditional IT maintenance activities, support and maintenance of ITSM tools require specialized skills, resources and facilities. Organizations should look for single-point multivendor solutions for meeting service levels and ensuring continuous availability of applications. The vendor must have the capability to help customers automate, maintain, and support core ITSM functions and reduce the overall cost of IT operations.

Key Considerations When Selecting Service Providers

Beware of Hype: Because the integration of data is so important, organizations get caught up in vendor hype about the ease of tool integration. However, it is not easy to integrate various best-of-breed tools for enabling higher availability of business critical applications.

Implement a Validation Process: IT managers will need to ask pointed questions to vendors about implementation capabilities, total cost of solution implementation, list of reference customers, training, and post-sales support.

IT managers need to ask themselves the following questions:

Do we have visibility into service management tools' availability and utilization?

Can we quickly classify assets based on business criticality?

Can we capture assets in the depth required for federation into the organizations' CMDB?

Are service management implementations aligned to meet business goals?

How are budgets being optimized effectively to manage ITSM tools and technologies?

How can we improve customer satisfaction service levels while reducing operational costs?

Without an integrated ITSM solution set, it is nearly impossible to deliver the quality of service expected by business users. The vendor must work closely with clients to bring visibility to their assets, making the best use of existing IT investments and ensuring infrastructure knowledge is available to all IT functions to bring the highest quality of service to their customers.