

TeamQuest and ITIL Version 2

Part 4 — Implementing Service Level Management

Widely adopted or considered, IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) Version 2 is still relevant today. Yes, a refreshed version has been released, but that version relies on core processes from Version 2. Many of the core processes in the new Version 3 are contained within the Service Delivery component of Version 2. Service Level Management is one of the key processes of ITIL Version 2 and all the key elements of the process have been carried over to the new version. No matter which version you choose, this paper will provide an informative overview of this important ITIL process that is responsible for defining the scope and ensuring the quality of IT services delivered to its customers.



About the Author

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Introduction

Service Level Management (SLM) is arguably the most important set of processes within the ITIL Version 2 framework. SLM processes provide a framework by which services are defined and levels of service supporting business processes are agreed upon. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and Operational Level Agreements (OLAs) are developed to satisfy the conditions of the agreements, and associated costs of service are developed.

SLAs define the bounds within which each service is provided. They provide a point of reference by which the success of delivered services are measured. SLAs also transfer the accountability for the definition of levels of service from IT to the business. If done right, they also offer the business units choices.

For example, when we were children, most of us had some type of vegetable that we didn't like. Nonetheless, our parents would put it on our plates and say something like, "Eat it. It's good for you." Later in life we discovered restaurants. There we were presented with a menu of items from which we could choose.

In many companies, business units feel the same way we did as children. They do not understand (and in many cases do not participate in) the discussions behind the development of the IT budget and the services rendered. As a result it is known as the "IT Budget" instead of the "Our Organization's IT Budget." Implementing SLAs transforms the "IT Budget" into a series of business budgets to purchase IT services. As a result, the business units have choices, usually driven by need and economics. They may not like the end result, but they control the levels of service rendered within the constraints of the business' ability to pay.

Therefore executing SLM processes permits IT staff to more accurately and cost effectively provision identified levels of service to the business. The processes ensure business and IT leaders understand their roles and responsibilities; they empower the business units.

In the end, they are the ones justifying to senior management the levels of service needed to support business processes — not IT — and all work is in direct support of the business, not for technology's sake. Finally, the built in continuous improvement processes ensure that when business needs change, supporting IT services change with them.

The processes ensure business and IT understand their roles and responsibilities. The processes empower the business units.

Why Service Level Management First?

Service Level Management processes are tightly integrated with business and customer management processes, Financial Management for IT services, and Capacity Management (CM). By implementing SLM first, the agreements are in place and goals set, establishing the guidelines for the development of the other services and processes thus reducing the time needed to develop them and become fully operational.

Without disciplines in place, the organization may be in a poor position to manage external sourcing vendors and control sourcing costs.

The immediate benefits SLM will bring to the organization are:

- Enabling IT to understand the individual business units' service needs and the individual business units to understand the IT services provided. With better understanding, service quality expectations can be more accurately set and service quality more effectively measured, monitored and reported.
- Business and IT clearly understanding their roles and responsibilities, the details of the services to be provided and the associated costs. Thus the value that IT brings to the business processes is clearly understood.
- Establishing points of reference for each IT service by which service performance and quality can be measured and reported.
- Providing the necessary flexibility for business to react quickly and compete in an ever-changing marketplace.
- Requiring that levels of service are clearly defined, creating more accurate infrastructure sizing. This ensures the appropriate amount of capacity is available, thus avoiding or mitigating the costs of unnecessary excess capacity and/or service performance problems due to insufficient capacity.
- Supporting internal or external sourcing of IT services through disciplines. Without disciplines in place, the organization may be in a poor position to manage external sourcing vendors and control sourcing costs.

The Service Level Management Process

The desired goal is to provide a service that is proactive rather than reactive in nature.

Service Level Management is responsible for ensuring that the appropriate IT services are in place to satisfy planned business needs and that those services are economically viable and effectively used. The desired goal is to provide a service that is proactive rather than reactive in nature.

The high level steps in the SLM process are:

- Identify business requirements — the process establishes a dialogue between the individual business units and IT to determine needs for IT services and the bounds of service performance. Requirements will cover the scope of services, timeliness, hours of operation, recovery aspects, and service performance. This step is usually time-consuming due to comprehension of the individual business process needs and translating them into IT service requirements.
- Develop and maintain a service catalog — process by which the details of all IT services are identified and categorized. Individual components of the IT services and the work required to support them are understood and documented. Where multiple classes of performance are offered for a service, the performance tiers are identified and documented. Costs of each service are identified and documented. Service level bounds for each service are identified

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and documented. The information is gathered and published in a single document for use by customers (those paying for the services) and users (those using the services). The service catalog will be the starting point in developing Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Most of this work is performed at process implementation time. Maintenance activities occur only when IT services or their related costs change.

- Perform gap analysis — process for determining gaps between business requirements and available services. Results of this process could be the establishment of a new IT service or the modification of an existing service.
- Sizing and costing — working with Capacity, Finance, Availability, and Continuity Management, determine the costs related to services needed to satisfy business demand. This is an iterative process with the goal being to determine service goals that satisfy business needs at a price the business can afford.
- Define and negotiate — this process covers the work of drafting and refining SLAs, ensuring they meet business requirements and gaining agreement from all parties involved. In parallel, work to define Operational Level Agreements (OLAs) is performed in conjunction with all the service providers supporting the IT service. The service providers can be from internal or external organizations.
- Implement the SLA — once all parties have agreed, the SLA is published, a start date determined and the affected operational teams notified.
- Measure SLA performance and report results.
- Refine — assess the effectiveness of the service, locate where gaps or changes have occurred and execute the SLA definition process to adjust the SLA.

Which ITIL Processes Interface with SLM?

Service Level Management processes are tightly integrated with business and customer management processes, Financial Management for IT Services, and Capacity Management.

The interface to Capacity Management (CM) is probably the most important. CM collects and condenses IT infrastructure performance and usage data before passing it to SLM. The data is used for Service Level Agreement sizing and to measure the effectiveness of services supporting in-place SLAs.

Service results are communicated to management and information about service gaps and interruptions are communicated to CM so that capacity positions can be assessed and approved changes implemented in order to sustain SLA requirements.

Staffing Considerations

The manager needs to understand business processes and have a solid understanding on all facets of IT technology.

The service level manager must be an expert in customer relationship management. This person needs to be a people person, able to communicate well and build relationships with business and technical staff. The manager needs to understand business processes and have a solid understanding on all facets of IT technology. Over time this person will probably interface with every leader in the organization.

The manager will need strong negotiation skills to be able to initiate and close the SLA work. This person must understand the business of IT and the associated costs. The manager must be able to translate business process needs into components of IT services and must be able to influence corrective actions when service anomalies occur or historical trends signal potential service problems.

Reporting

Good candidates for these positions have experience with management reports, especially in condensing highly technical information into simple dashboards and senior management status reports. Since reports are communicated across a wide cross-section of the organization, these candidates must be able to discuss results to a very diverse audience – from the very technical to executives.

Process Champion

This is the person auditing the process on an annual basis and responsible for making the appropriate process changes as dictated by changes in the workflow. This is usually not a full-time position and could be filled outside the SLM team.

Steps to Implement Service Level Management

All successful projects start with a project plan. Implementing Service Level Management is no different. A project manager with a record of success in implementing large, complex projects should be assigned. Additional staff, as required by the company's project management process, should be assigned at the same time. Support staff will be needed to document the progress. Since this implementation could be a pilot, the support staff should be sufficient to quickly handle any anomalies during the execution of the project plan and should be the ones to make adjustments to the general implementation procedures to smooth the way for future process implementations.

Step 1 — Gather the Data

The first step is to identify an SLM Manager. In most shops this should be a “full time” position, albeit the actual work involved may only be part time in smaller shops. This person should not be part of an operational team as day-to-day challenges and occasional crises tend to distract the SLM staff from maintaining a service performance and quality view.

Perform a current state assessment. This is frequently done with the assistance of a consultant or facilitator, however Office of Government Commerce (OGC) does provide a self-assessment checklist that can be used to narrow the focus of the assessment work. The project team should survey the entire IT organization and discover where and to what extent SLM work is being performed today.

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A tools and software inventory should also be performed. In most organizations, different tools are used by different departments to perform monitoring, capacity planning, performance management, and chargeback work. Data from these tools can be used to support the SLM processes. Experience shows that in many cases, SLM can leverage capacity management tools leaving minimal requirements for reporting.

Once the assessment and inventories have been completed, the next step is to perform a gap analysis. The gap analysis will show areas that need process improvements or new work to be performed and where efforts are duplicated. Staffing needs and/or skills and training requirements will be identified. The project team will identify any tools needs and any duplication. The results of the gap analysis are essential to building the project plan, defining the work that needs to be accomplished, identifying any tools that need to be acquired along with the staffing requirements and costs.

Now that the gap analysis has revealed the changes required to migrate to the new organization, the project plan can be developed and a cost analysis completed. Staffing, tools and equipment needs will be translated into costs and included in the cost analysis.

Step 2 — Build the Plan

The plan will be responsible for establishing three major components of Capacity Management — people, processes and tools.

Sufficient information will be available to tailor an implementation plan to attain vision after completing the gap analysis. The plan will be responsible for establishing the three major components of Capacity Management — people, processes and tools. The plan will also determine the costs necessary to sustain the organization, build a preliminary budget and compare it to the current expenditures for similar function — possibly spread across the organization.

The components of the implementation plan are:

Determine where the Service Level Manager is located in the IT organization. The ideal placement is as a direct report to the CIO, IT Director or within the service management group. It should be noted that a number of organizations opt to place it in the operations area. This may not be a good choice as applications and user areas may believe Service Level Management may make biased decisions in favor of operations. In addition, SLM can get bogged down with day-to-day details and lose its focus when attached to an operational area.

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Sufficient time must be allowed to develop documents describing the processes. The documents should have a description of all the data inputs, information outputs and work processes. A flow chart of the workflow should also be included. Much thought needs to occur to ensure all interfaces and work are identified. In addition, the project plan needs to develop a process and identify a team to handle any process gaps during or immediately following implementation.

Due to the demands on their talents, the project manager should schedule the work with corporate communications well in advance so project goals can be achieved.

The plan, which will vary depending on management's decision to staff internally or externally, must include tasks to identify and train people performing the work. In addition, the plan should allocate sufficient time for Human Resources to review and adopt job descriptions. Sufficient time must also be built into the plan to train not only the SLM team but any other IT team that interfaces with SLM. Many organizations have chosen to train all IT staff on SLM processes since in many ways SLAs and OLAs involve everyone in the IT organization. Some organizations choose to train their business managers on SLM processes since they will be involved in SLA negotiations at some point.

Any work regarding acquisition, consolidation and/or implementation of capacity and performance tools will be included in the plan. If tools are to be acquired, the project manager needs to allow sufficient time in the plan for corporate acquisition policies and procedures to be followed.

Once the project plan and the budget have been completed, the project manager and the project sponsor present the plan for approval.

The project manager needs to develop and discuss the plan and its processes with the organization. Many organizations use their internal corporate communications team to accomplish this task. Due to demands on their talents, the project manager should schedule the work with corporate communications well in advance so project goals can be achieved.

The project should include members of the finance team so a comprehensive implementation and ongoing operations budget can be developed. In addition, these project team members will assist in identifying current expenditures throughout the organization that performs Capacity Management functions. All the financial information is then fed into the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) document and submitted to management with the proposed project plan.

Project reports should be determined and agreed upon. Many organizations employ the use of a dashboard report, using traffic lights (green, yellow, red) to signify project status. Where dashboards are employed, each measurement should be composed of two indicators – current status and trend.

Once the project plan and the budget have been completed, the project manager and the project sponsor present the plan for approval.

Step 3 — Execute the Plan

Assign the Staff

The SLM staff should be assigned at the beginning of the implementation project. By participating from the onset, the staff is very familiar with all facets of the processes, business and technology data.

Document and Publish the Processes

Since this is a pilot, defining and writing the processes is more work than a “normal” ITIL implementation. Interim interfaces to existing IT units have to be identified as well as those needed for end-state so work can be accomplished with a minimum of interruption while the rest of the organization rolls out.

It is necessary to document the workflow: inputs, outputs, work accomplished, steps to accomplish, who does the work, who receives the work, and outside assistance needed to execute the processes. It may be advantageous to employ the services of a professional writer to do the bulk of the work with management and technical staff creating an outline to minimize disruption of day-to-day activities. Doing so ensures the processes are documented consistently, in the same format and in the same language (tone and wording).

Acquire and Implement the Tools

Historical infrastructure performance data and reporting tools are as important as the people in SLM. The accurate reporting of service performance is critical to the team's success. Before the team can develop service levels, they need to understand what levels of service are currently being delivered. Without the right detailed data it is difficult for the staff to efficiently or effectively execute processes and procedures. Ideally a single tool will provide all the functions mentioned below. However economics may dictate that a number of existing products must be used and integrated. The service level manager must review the portfolio carefully to ensure that data from all tools is based upon the same collection interval and that data can be easily moved among tools. Manual input of data from one tool into another can be a productivity drain and subject to errors. Therefore it is advisable to have automated methods of integrating the tools. Temporary means may be utilized until the Capacity Management team is implemented and more sophisticated tools become available.

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Inventory IT Services and Build a Service Catalog

If a chargeback system is already in place, services may have already been identified and defined, so work here would be minimal. Otherwise IT work needs to be identified and broken into services. Chargeback will become a process once Financial Management is implemented. This means services must be defined in ways that meet Financial Management's requirements where utilization data can be obtained and associated to a particular service. Examples of services are Daytime Batch, Web Services, Application Maintenance, and Network Services. In building services, one must account for support services that the customer or user does not see. Therefore each service should account for overhead components such as operating system maintenance, security, change control, management oversight, and backup/recovery.

The catalog should identify each service, describe the functions provided and the terms of service (e.g., hours of operation, customer support options), any service tiers, and the unit costs of the service. The service owner should be identified along with contact information. Identify the support included with the service such as database definition and/or indexing, job scheduling or application tuning support.

Identify, Develop, Negotiate and Implement SLAs and OLAs

The first step should be to canvass the users and customers to determine their feelings toward the existing IT services. In accomplishing this task, the team will identify a list of business units for which SLAs need to be developed and a feeling of customer satisfaction for existing services. In conjunction with this work, the team needs to gather any historical performance data. This data will be used as a baseline to draft the initial SLAs.

The second step will be to work with the individual business units to identify their IT requirements and translate them into components of IT services.

The second step will be to work with the individual business units to identify their IT requirements and translate them into components of IT services. This is probably one of the most difficult and labor-intensive tasks. Keep a good customer focus.

In most cases your business partners will welcome you when you want to understand their business processes and determine their service needs. They are as proud of what they do as you are of your work. However, in some cases the business is not sure of its requirements and in others, there is no desire to quantify or cap services. When those situations are encountered, it is vital that senior leadership intervene and lend its support.

Once the data has been gathered and the business requirements translated into components of service, the team must start to craft the SLAs and underpinning OLAs.

Once the data has been gathered and the business requirements translated into components of service, the team must start to craft the SLAs and underpinning OLAs. These documents should be written at a basic level so everyone can understand. Each should only be a page or two in length and include:

- An introduction that identifies
 - The parties involved
 - Start, end and review dates
 - Scope of the agreement
 - Description of the services provided
 - Roles and responsibilities of each of the parties
- Hours of operation
- Service availability
- Service reliability
- Support
- Throughput, transaction times and/or response times
- Change turnaround targets
- Security requirements and consideration
- Service continuity
- Costs of the service and how they are charged
- Service reporting
- Service incentives and penalties

OLAs are generally processed first since they impact the terms of the SLAs. Once the OLAs have been finalized and agreed upon, the SLA drafts are shared with the customer for review and approval. Refinements usually occur during this process before all parties agree and sign the documents. For example, an email service would probably have OLAs for server maintenance services, online data storage services, email application support services, network services, backup and recovery services and perhaps other site-specific services.

Gap Analysis

As a result of the previous work, the team may identify required services not currently provided by IT. In those cases, the team will use the SLM processes to assess the needs, identify and cost-justify solutions and implement them upon approval.

Metrics should be fewer in number, succinct, and to the point, while still providing management with good representation of the unit's effectiveness.

In addition, the team may encounter contradictions that will need to be resolved through the SLM processes. An example of a contradiction is a service requirement for 24x7 services with near-100% availability with a business contingency recovery time of 10 days. In this case the team should question the need for such a high availability system (and the associated costs) for a business process that can be inactive for 10 days without harming the organization as a whole.

Define Metrics to Measure Success

As with all ITIL processes, there needs to be a way to measure the success and ongoing performance of the different IT units. Metrics need to be meaningful and measurable. They should be tied to business value rather than technical measures. Metrics should be fewer in number, succinct, and to the point, while still providing management with good representation of the unit's effectiveness.

Remember that each ITIL process will have at least one metric, which will be rolled up into an overall IT report. It is necessary to keep metrics at a manageable level as executives and managers do not have the time or desire to read through many pages of metrics reports. In SLM, most metrics will be related to service quality.

Build the Training Materials and Execute the Training Plan

As stated previously, sufficient time must be built into the plan to train not only the SLM team but any other team that interfaces with Service Level Management. To accomplish this, it will be necessary to develop training materials based upon the processes previously drafted. Generally the use of a presentation tool such as Microsoft PowerPoint or Adobe Acrobat is desirable since it permits self-study or group presentations.

From previous experience, self-study seems to work well in a busy IT environment. However managers must ensure that each member of their staff has sufficient time to read and comprehend the information. Some organizations have opted to develop online training facilities, permitting staff to go through the material in a computer-based interactive environment.

To ensure comprehension, testing should be performed. Passing the test should be made mandatory. Some organizations offer financial incentives, others tie success to future compensation and include them in staff "Major Job Objectives."

Once again, it cannot be stressed enough that you increase your chances for success and commit fewer mis-steps by spending more time testing. In most cases, the workflows will be substantially different than the work performed today; therefore, it is necessary for each staff member to understand the work for which he or she is accountable and the value of the work to the organization.

Implement Reporting and Exception Processes and Procedures

Quality of service cannot be determined without some type of reporting. Two types of reporting need to be put into place. High-level reporting is used to keep senior management informed of service quality. These reports are generally in the form of a "dashboard", using the colors red, yellow, and green to represent service quality. It is important that each service has two measures—current status and trend.

For example, a service with a yellow current status indicator and a green trend indicator may need less attention than a service with a green current status indicator and a yellow or red trend indicator.

The SLM team and those staff assisting with corrective actions need more detailed reporting to identify problematic service areas and to track results of actions taken.

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Step 4 — Initiate the Ongoing Work of SLM

After the SLAs have been signed and implementations scheduled, the real work of SLM starts. Reporting needs to be put in place. The reporting process should be automated with some intelligence built in to alert the SLM team when service performance starts to under perform or fails to meet agreed upon performance targets. In addition, proactive trending intelligence should be put in place to alert the SLM staff when trends show that performance is approaching the agreed upon limits. Doing so permits the team to take corrective actions in time to prevent service outages or poor service performance.

Review meetings should be scheduled on a regular basis to cover results. These meetings are normally held monthly or quarterly and should take no more than one hour. To maintain interest, the data presented should be concise and only address performance issues and corrective actions. Do not read down a list of metrics and cite results.

The continuous improvement process will be engaged as the review dates specified in the individual SLAs are reached. In addition, unforeseen business events could cause early review of affected services. The service level manager needs to be aware of business plans and events so work to adjust SLAs where needed can be completed and put in place prior to the actual event.

Step 5 — Perform Post-implementation Review

At the end of the implementation project, the project manager should quickly put together a “lessons learned” document that identifies any process changes that would facilitate future process migrations. Any implementation process changes should be made at this time.

Perform a post-implementation audit 6-12 months after completion. Determine if the new processes are being adhered to and if the new organization is delivering the expected business benefit. Some of the questions that should be asked are:

...put together a ‘lessons learned’ document that identifies any process changes that would facilitate future process migrations.

- Did we accomplish what we set out to do?
- Are the metrics measuring the team’s performance valid?
- Is the team communicating successfully with the organization in accordance with the SLM processes?
- Are the interfaces working smoothly?
- Did we meet expectations on benefit delivered to the business?
- Have IT services improved overall?
- Are we capturing the correct data?
- Are the processes accepted and observed by staff, both internal and external to SLM?

Success Factors

- Management needs to be very supportive of training, implementation and execution efforts. Managers at all levels need to be ITIL cheerleaders.
- Business units must be willing to work within the new processes.
- Business units must support Service Level Agreements.

The business work must continue in spite of the changes so when gaps occur it is essential that the gaps can be addressed before service problems occur.

- The right people must be in the right positions to do the work.
- Patience is needed to allow the teams sufficient time to become proficient in the new processes and for old behaviors to die.
- Processes and pre-defined teams need to be in place and ready for dealing with gaps once implementation is completed. These teams will be used until all ITIL implementations have been completed. The business work must continue in spite of the changes so when gaps occur it is essential that the gaps can be addressed before service problems occur.
- Compensation policies should be adjusted to reinforce ITIL practices and drive the appropriate behaviors. Common goals should be in place for all ITIL processes, especially financial and quality.

Potential Inhibitors

- Unrealistic expectations by management can erode confidence in the processes. One must remember that a large number of companies have successfully implemented ITIL frameworks and best practices, many considering the new organization a competitive advantage. To succeed, they ensured management expectations were set realistically.
- Some management may view this unit as purely overhead and superfluous, making it difficult to sustain the team and its value to the organization.
- Substantial resistance to developing SLAs and OLAs can erode the effectiveness of the unit as a whole. If senior management fails to support the processes, the unit will fail.
- A lack of patience could result in partial or cancelled implementation. It takes staff, and those who interface with the organization, time to become familiar with new workflows. It is essential to allow sufficient time for gaps and issues to be addressed and processes to mature.
- Not enforcing adherence to processes may result in falling back to old behaviors. Two processes are more confusing and probably more detrimental than a single bad process. Surprisingly, a significant amount of work is accomplished through the influence of social networks.

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...one company saw the time needed to install a software change reduce from 45 days to 2 days due to ITIL process improvements.

Managers must resist the temptation and let the processes work. It may not seem like it at the time but when all implementations are completed and the staff is familiar with the new processes, work will flow through the system much faster. For example one company saw the time needed to install a software change reduce from 45 days to 2 days due to ITIL process improvements.

The Bottom Line

Implementing the Service Level Management framework and best practices takes a lot of work, perseverance and determination but the benefits to your organization make it worth the efforts. Once processes mature, your customers will be delighted as expectations have been set, they understand what service they will receive and the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved. Management will applaud the effective use of IT resources achieved by efficiencies produced through the right-sizing and business justification of the levels of service provided.

TeamQuest Addresses ITIL Service Level Management

TeamQuest directly supports ITIL Service Level Management processes by providing a practical approach for determining SLAs and helping identify the right balance of service and associated costs to provision it.

TeamQuest Model allows you to run multiple scenarios to show business units the impact of various SLA decisions — helping to determine the optimal performance levels needed to meet business unit goals while ensuring that these metrics can be tracked and reported on an ongoing basis.

TeamQuest IT Service Analyzer and TeamQuest IT Service Reporter provide unique flexibility to run reports using performance data in whatever manner is necessary to document performance against SLA metrics. These products also provide a monthly analysis and capture historical data for trend reporting, which enables IT to proactively predict potential issues and address them before they become a problem.

TeamQuest software supports Service Level Management by:

- Gathering historical and real-time data on service performance
- Determining current levels of service to use as a starting point in SLA negotiations
- Providing the performance data required to make informed decisions regarding SLAs
- Allowing you to experiment with multiple scenarios to determine resources needed to meet business unit goals
- Determining whether SLAs are sustainable on current hardware or if upgrades are required
- Tracking and reporting service performance against SLAs on an ongoing basis
- Proactively alerting IT of impending bottlenecks so they can be resolved before impacting service performance

As with all major projects, proper planning is key. TeamQuest recommends following the steps previously mentioned in this paper when implementing ITIL Service Level Management.

Bibliography

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