

*The most commonly used standards and frameworks in the IT world are those created by the International Organisation for Standards and those found within the Information Technology Infrastructure Library – ISO and ITIL'*

## A measure of value

Standards and frameworks can help to define the nebulous in IT service delivery. More importantly, they can also provide a measurement of value, writes ALEX MEEHAN

**T**he world of standards and frameworks can be confusing to the uninitiated.

Replete with complicated three letter acronyms and confusing five digit serial numbers, it can come as a surprise that the role of standards and frameworks in IT is actually to simplify and de-complicate potentially overwhelming processes.

"It all comes down to the need that companies have to measure quality in IT," said Ken Wilson, vice president of Computer Associates' service management practice.

"When people say things like 'we want to have a world-class service desk' what does that mean? That goal has to be broken down into measureable components such as customer satisfaction, cost, return on investment and process maturity before you can start to get an idea of whether there is a level of excellence."

Even then, one company's idea of excellence could be very different from another, so it becomes necessary to have an independently-assessed, internationally-recognised set of measureable qualities which, taken together, point to best

practice.

To this end, the most commonly used standards and frameworks in the IT world are those created by the International Organisation for Standards (ISO) and those found within the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL).

### Acronym soup

"As the IT industry matured in the 1980s, it became important to be able to measure performance, and to do that you needed a criteria to measure it against. Generally, the best bodies of knowledge were recognised to be Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) or Control Objectives for Information and related Technology (COBIT). They gave you best practices and from that you can be deemed to have standards," said Wilson.

ITIL came into being in the late 1980s in the UK, and was conceived as a way of bringing standardisation and best practices to government IT. Since then, the concepts and policies contained within ITIL have been revised three times.

"Essentially, ITIL describes how best to control and

manage an IT infrastructure. As times have changed and technology has moved on from mainframe to distributed computing to web-based computing, the key values have remained unchanged and it's as valid now as it was then," said Wilson.

Meanwhile, the Swiss-based International

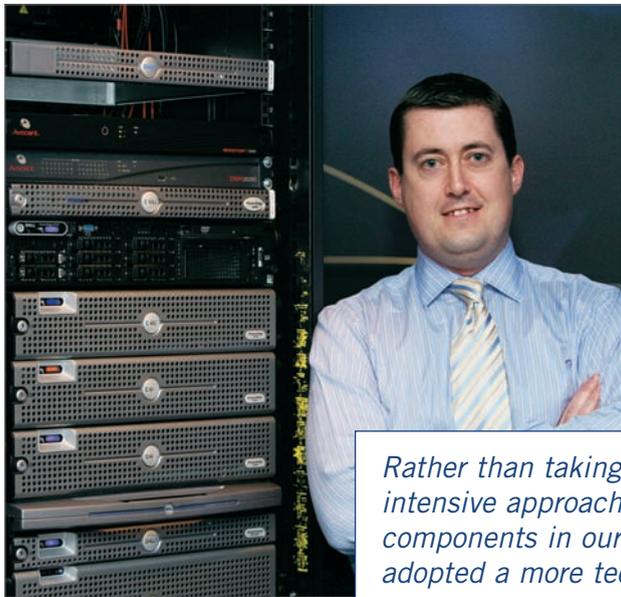
Organisation for Standards has been in existence since 1947 and its standards are recognised in 157 countries. In the IT world, the most commonly followed standards issued by this body include ISO 20000 for service management, ISO 27001 for security and ISO 9000 for quality management.

"ITIL is like an a la carte



*ISO 20000 is a standard that says you have a quality service management system in place and by its very nature, that's meant to increase the value and quality of the service you offer to the customer*

Mark O'Loughlin, IT Alliance



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**Paul Kenny, Dell**

valuable piece of mind for companies looking for reassurance that managed service providers have substance behind their sales patter.

**Management expectation**

“For companies using managed services or data centres, there is an expectation that their data and various systems will be

Nightingale, this is where internationally agreed standards come into play. “Take ISO 270001, a security standard,” he said.

“You would expect that a company [working] to that standard would have total control over access and network operations and the physical security of your data, and even of how they maintain the networks, and that there is no risk of your data being compromised.”

“The same is true of the ISO 20000 service management standard. As the customer, you want to know that the hosting service has the capacity to support you, and that if they have any incidents or problems that they’re properly managed. You don’t want their procedures to be made up on the spot as problems occur.”

**Popularity rising**

According to Mark O’Loughlin, service management consultant for the IT Alliance Group, the ISO standards have been increasing in popularity in recent years, with more companies attempting to get them.

“Something like ISO 20000 is a standard that says you have a quality service

*One of the major driving forces behind the adoption of standards in IT is the need to show potential costumers an independently audited statement of quality’*

religion – people tend to pick and choose which bits to adopt,” said Johnathan Ferris, head of managed services architecture with BT.

“On its own ITIL won’t fix or drive a high performing managed service. It’s a framework, a methodology, and if you don’t have a team behind it that understands how to do ITIL implementation, then it’s not enough.”

“It’s only as useful as the people implementing it. You have to merge it with people’s experience to come up with your own business model of how to do best practice.”

Ferris points out that often people confuse the functions of ITIL and the various ISO standards.

**Mixed up**

“You sometimes hear people say they want an ITIL-compliant service, but technically there’s no such thing. A company can get its staff individually certified and accredited with ITIL, but as an entity the company can’t get the same accreditation,” he said.

“However, broadly speaking there’s an equivalent to ITIL in the

ISO world, the ISO 20000 accreditation, and a company and its systems can be audited and accredited to this standard. One is for individuals and the other is for companies and their business processes.”

“A company can’t be ITIL compliant, all it can do is use the methodology and the experience of its own staff to come up with a standardised, structured and mature way of dealing with services.”

“Either way, companies using these standards and frameworks are saying to the world that their people are ITIL-qualified, that the way that they work is ITIL-focused and that their business has a rubber stamp to say it is regularly and continually audited to ISO standards,” said Ferris.

One of the major driving forces behind the adoption of standards in IT is the need to show potential costumers an independently audited statement of quality.

When factored into a service level agreement (SLA), a third party certification can provide

managed properly and in a considered manner,” said Clive Nightingale of Certification Europe.

“Companies outsourcing their technology are placing a lot of trust in a third party and they expect the job to be done properly, but when the service being provided is complex it becomes a challenge to know if that is the case. How do you even know what a correctly done service looks like, unless a problem occurs and procedural flaws come to light?”

According to



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**Jonathan Ferris, BT**

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<< *It's all about delivering value and quality. From a managed service point of view, if you don't deliver those then you're not going to get repeat business'*

management system in place and by its very nature, that's meant to increase the value and quality of the service you offer to the customer," he said.

"Standards such as this are differentiators in the marketplace, but in reality there are hundreds of companies operating without them. For example, the ISO 20000 website lists all the countries and organisations using this standard, and the number is in the hundreds rather than thousands," he said.

"It's all about delivering value and quality. From a managed service point of view, if you don't deliver those then you're not going to get repeat business. The customer may be dissatisfied and you'll be dropped."

According to O'Loughlin, companies interested in raising their game to achieve recognition to an international standard or framework have a number of options. "With the standards, you can do two things – you can certify to them or you can comply with them, and they are two different things," he said.

"Take something like the ISO 20000 standard, where there are 14 listed disciplines. You have to tick all the various boxes to cover all of them, from problem and change management to supplier management, and have processes, procedures and policies to support that. You have to go the whole



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nine yards.

"This allows you to have an auditor come and independently assess you and, if you score well on all these distinct areas, you will get a certification to say you are certified to that standard."

This is perhaps the most straightforward way to approach certification, but compliance to a standard is also an option.

### Compliance

"If you are a managed services operation and you're only interested in part of the standard, you can take that piece of the standard, apply it to your business and comply with it. You can't get full certification, but to do a full certification is very costly, involving many man hours of work and external consultants," said O'Loughlin.

"Full certification does help your business, but it doesn't necessarily mean everything you touch turns to gold. It says to the world that you've got your head above water and that you compare favourably to any competitors that don't have it."

"Smaller companies generally won't be able to afford to do this, but it's generally an indication that you have a lot of backing behind what you offer. At that stage, you're generally delivering better quality, better value, better repeatable processes – in general, what you do is of a higher standard than others."

This piecemeal approach of taking the useful parts of a larger standard is an approach currently finding favour among many IT companies.

"A lot of what we're doing at the moment is based on providing components of ITIL framework to customers in varying forms," said Paul Kenny, global infrastructure consulting practice manager for Dell Ireland, who said that Dell has a little known but successful global managed

service business.

"An area where we add a lot of ITIL-related value is at the service desk in areas such as incident and resolution management, and change and problem management. However, rather than taking a people or labour intensive approach to adopting ITIL components in our service delivery, we've adopted a more technology-based approach."

"Also, we're



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Clive Nightingale, Certification Europe

providing customers with the capability to deliver elements of the ITIL framework without having to invest too heavily in infrastructure, either on-premise hardware to deliver things like asset management, or components for license compliance," he said.

### Standards as a service

According to Kenny, Dell has made a number of acquisitions to support that strategy and to drive a more modular service, based in the cloud.

"This allows us to deliver software-as-a-service offerings that bring that service back to the end users in a more cost-effective manner, rather than having to invest in expensive on-premise solutions. This reduces your running costs," he said.

"We've seen that a lot of our customers are spending up to 70% of their IT budgets on maintenance, basically on keeping the lights on. Deploying these solutions in the way we do allows these same customers to reduce that spend and then as a result increase their discretionary spend.

"That way, they can do more innovative things and deliver new services to end users or improve their existing service levels."

According to Mark O'Loughlin, ITIL has been upgraded in recent years to version three, and now

includes a number of extra disciplines.

"It's not the only managed framework process out there, it's just the most popular," he said. There is also Microsoft's Operation Framework, known as MOF, but that's very data centre server-specific, so it doesn't necessarily fit everyone's needs"

"Between the various frameworks out there, there's a good mix to be had. If I'm doing ITIL consultancy for a company, I actually tend to look at ITIL, MOF and ISO 20000 and blend them in."

### Panacea

On the subject of service level agreements (SLAs), O'Loughlin said that while standards are very useful and important tools, it's important not to overplay their role.

"You can have the best processes in place but they may not help you achieve an SLA if they're not designed with that in mind," he said. "One thing that people have a tendency to do is think that something like ITIL or ISO 20000 will solve all their problems. Instead, they should look at the problems they have first and ask specifically how these standards will fix the problem – they often won't."

"You don't need standards to agree an SLA – you can agree an SLA without anything in place, but you're taking a risk if you do so." ■