How ITIL Helps Cloud Computing

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TRIGGER: Is ITIL still relevant with cloud computing and virtualisation?

SETTING: Most IT organisations use ITIL service management to improve their service delivery, yet those organisations often face significant challenges with cloud computing. Cloud is a service consumption model, so to succeed with cloud, you need service management. This brief explores ITIL in the context of cloud computing.

SUMMARY: Mainstream IT organisations are adopting cloud services and cloud services change the nature of IT operations (ops). Cloud ops now must manage services. Organisations using ITIL have an awareness of services. However, traditional (non-cloud) ITIL typically isn’t optimised for the faster pace, volume of changes and supplier management approach that cloud requires. Instead, ITIL is often optimised to improve availability of components and systems. ITIL for cloud requires service reliability instead of component availability. That’s a major shift for ITIL processes and the organisations that manage them.

As firms move toward cloud services, many IT leaders find their existing ITIL structures do not support cloud well, resulting in frustration and limiting the value cloud promises. Yet ITIL is able to support cloud operations well. While ITIL processes are the same for cloud computing, the methods used must change. Before embarking on an ITIL cloud program, become familiar with the full suite of efforts required for success with ITIL: governance, quality, maturity, organisational change, and project management at a minimum. Understand that the largest factor for failure with ITIL is staff resistance due to role ambiguity and role conflict, which makes managing human resources fundamental to ITIL success. Aim for "quick wins" using ITIL guidance in order to grow competence and commitment to your cloud initiative.

To use ITIL with cloud, ITIL processes must adapt. Doing so will position you and your firm to benefit from the enhanced business agility, innovation, and revenue growth that cloud can deliver.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Cloud computing is an on-demand, self-service, elastic, and measured (pay-as-you-go) service. Cloud is a service consumption model, whereas traditional IT is an “install and maintain” model. Cloud services are available in minutes as opposed to traditional IT’s weeks or months. To obtain the benefits of cloud—cost reduction, increased speed to market, and innovation—you
must tune your ITIL processes.

• A majority of IT leaders worldwide use ITIL for service management, and research shows its benefits can be substantial. When properly used, ITIL enables IT organisations to maintain delivery of more and higher-quality services in the face of increasing demand and fixed budgets. Since cloud computing is service delivery, ITIL plays a major role in success with cloud.

• ITIL is a complex framework in mainstream adoption. Along with highly publicized successes, there are failures undermining and blurring its potential for many. With cloud computing, the situation gets more confusing. ITIL processes need to adapt to the reduced time frames and changes in focus cloud efforts require.

• Investments in ITIL are directly applicable to cloud computing and virtualisation. The ITIL focus on managing services and service providers by business value has increasing relevance to IT leaders and their firms—especially in the context of cloud computing.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO:

• Question your perceptions of ITIL, and be sure you use ITIL for its intended purpose. ITIL is a reference that describes generic service management best practices. With cloud, external providers do most of the work, so cloud ops teams must shift to managing services and service providers. Examine your existing ITIL implementation to determine if your teams are at the required level of ability. When assessing skills, consider:

  o Service level and supplier management transform from “nice to have” to “absolutely must have.”
  o Capacity management takes on an entirely new meaning, shifting from component (long lead time) to service (near real-time). In addition, with cloud, removing excess capacity is a critical success factor and not a task traditional IT teams are skilled in performing.
  o Event management and monitoring become critical since the cloud service masks the underlying IT infrastructure. User transactions (synthetic or live) become the basis of monitoring.
  o Incident and problem management shift from leading investigations and troubleshooting to gathering information and communicating status.
  o Strategy changes from “build or buy” to “rent” and the service portfolio requires careful attention to maximize benefits.
• Understand that in cloud, development (dev) teams may want to release software daily or hourly. The traditional weekly or monthly change planning meeting is too slow. Existing change and release management (ITIL) processes must change. IT governance, compliance, and auditing must adjust to the new change management processes, including IT compliance, security, and general computing controls. Also, access management must change to accommodate shifting roles and responsibilities.

• Familiarize yourself with the related framework types successful ITIL implementations require, such as Capability Maturity Model Integrated (CMMI), Control Objectives for Information and Related Technologies (COBIT), SERVQUAL, Six Sigma, and project management methodologies, such as those from the Project Management Institute (PMI). All require tuning to align with cloud.

• Assess your organisational maturity and staff capability regularly. Standardized and consistent process execution is essential to realizing ITIL benefits, so it’s important to manage staff resources to ensure learning and knowledge transfer. Dev quality assurance teams want to provision and configure platforms themselves in minutes and several times a day. The common “sixteen to eighteen weeks” for new platforms simply isn’t an option. Provisioning, request fulfillment, and traditional ops must change. In some cases, traditional roles will go away or transition to dev.

• Launch your cloud ITIL initiative now by forming a committee chartered with documenting services in business context and terms. Next, evaluate business needs or market initiatives with customers to understand how IT service improvement can augment desired business outcomes from cloud. Develop ITIL process improvement proposals justified by expected business value from cloud computing.

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