

How to Change *Change* (tuning what's under the ITIL Hood)

It has always surprised me that where the ITIL books are mostly very generic in the descriptions of the process activities, they can suddenly become very specific and, in some cases, very restrictive. Point in question is Change Management where a single Change Advisory Board (CAB) rules all changes, which in turn are neatly structured into Minor, Significant or Major impact categories.

ITIL needs to be generic in order to fit any organisation, of any size, in any sector, anywhere in the world. This is what makes ITIL so interesting and sometimes so challenging to implement. Incident Management, for instance, gives a good description of how Priority is defined using Impact and Urgency, even providing an example coding system (i.e. Impact × Urgency matrix), But there are no specifics around the levels. This means that, when 'implementing' the process, a suitable impact/urgency/priority coding system needs to be developed in consultation with the various stakeholders such as Customers, IT support staff and management. (as an aside: 'Implementation' is an ugly word and, in my opinion, is not applicable to ITIL processes which are always already present in some form; 'process improvement' is my preferred option, but that is a different article).

Many (starting) practitioners are struggling with these generic descriptions and are asking for templates and more prescriptive guidance. So, why isn't it necessarily a blessing when the ITIL books become more specific and more or less dictate certain structures? The answer is that sometimes this focuses people too much on the technicalities and specifics of the book, rather than the objectives and intention of the process. Take for instance the Change Advisory Board (CAB) in the Change Management process. Pretty much everyone agrees that there is only one CAB to maintain central control over the numerous changes going on (and potentially impacting each other). In order to avoid the CAB becoming overloaded with change requests, ITIL then describes a categorisations of RFCs, directing Minor Changes directly to the Change Manager (delegated authority) and Major Changes to something vaguely described as '*the organisation's top Management Board or other appropriate body*'.

Now that is plain and simple, leaving little to the imagination when implementing. But even in relatively small and compact organisations, the issue already arises on who makes up this CAB and how often they meet. If there are too many people in the CAB, it makes it harder to get everyone together and potentially puts certain people to sleep because there are change requests that are not relevant to them. However, too few people in the CAB make it easier to meet, but may exclude some of the essential stakeholders of a particular change. Workflow support can help here and most organisations settle on a fixed nucleus CAB meeting every week (or fortnight) with additional 'invitees' depending on the requests at hand.

Imagine now a more complex organisation, perhaps with several locations (countries) but most certainly a vast array of IT Services (and/or supported applications) and Business Customers. Now, in order to assemble a CAB that includes all necessary stakeholders (of both IT and Customer), we either have to rent out an auditorium every week, deal with numerous more-or-less relevant communications (e.g. e-mail or workflow), or accept that not everyone can be present all the time. The result, even with workflow tools, is a less-than-optimal functioning CAB, which may take some time (i.e. discussion) to make decisions, which are then not always accepted as the right people may not have been involved.

In this model, the CAB has become a bottleneck, feverishly trying to maintain control over all (significant) changes, informing stakeholders and making decisions, while slowly-but-surely drowning in a sea of overhead communication.

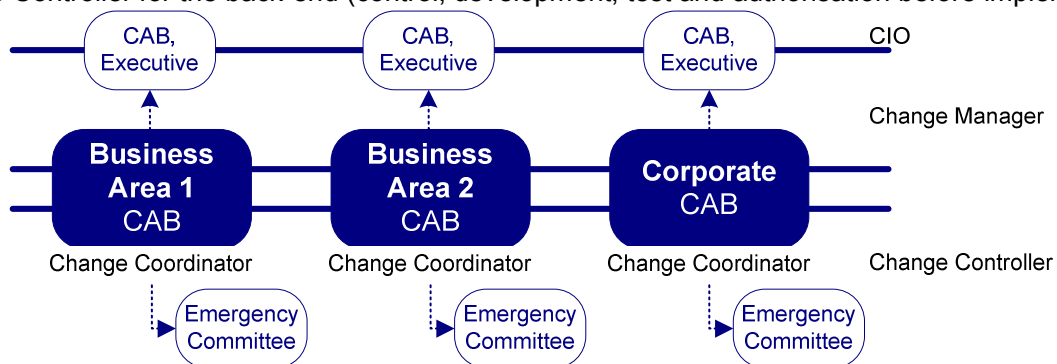
This is where the letter of the ITIL books needs to be relinquished in favour of the intent: '*The Change Advisory Board (CAB) is a body that exists to approve Changes and to assist Change Management in the assessment and prioritisation of changes*'. This doesn't necessarily imply there has to be only **ONE** CAB (apart from the use of this word in a singular form). In particular when the various IT Services can be clearly separated towards a business-focussed model it may be more effective to create multiple CABs, as long as attention is given to maintaining overall control and addressing cross-divisional changes.

Take, for instance, a client of mine: its business - due to mergers and the like - consists of two quite separate business streams. So rather than creating one 'overall' CAB, which would undoubtedly be ineffective as half the changes didn't affect half the members at any one time, we decided on two 'area' CABs. This had the added benefit that it was easier to accommodate existing decision and communication forums and was thus more palatable for both the Customer and IT management.

Each of the area-CABs was overseen by a Change Coordinator, basically a delegated Change Manager, performing the operational activities (managing and coordinating changes through the system) specifically for that area. Again, the 'logical' separation between the areas (which aligned with the business model) made it easier to appoint the correct people in these roles, both from a management (authority) and an acceptance perspective. As the area-CABs were very business focussed, we added a third CAB to oversee IT-only and shared-IT changes.

In order to overcome the silo-structure that was created (albeit business rather than technology focussed), we defined a number of roles that would operate horizontally across the areas. Firstly of course the Change Manager, who not only maintains the overall process management activities (reporting, review, etc.) but also functions as a mentor and escalation for the area-Change Coordinators. Above that (for further escalation and the management/control of Major Changes) the CIO, who backed the model and provided management commitment, support and process endorsement.

Finally, we created the role of Change Controller, someone who specifically (horizontally, across all CABs) would review, authorise, coordinate and control the changes from a technical (IT) perspective. This role also made a change in the further management of changes, into Release Management, whereby the Change Manager is responsible for the 'front-end' of Change Management (recording, assessment, authorisation) and the Change Controller for the back-end (control, development, test and authorisation before implementation).



These roles, together with the tool, allow for the objectives of central control to be maintained i.e. an oversight of all changes even though there are 3 instances of the CAB. At the same time, the model provides a much better alignment to the business, providing more involvement of the Customers and thus a better management of the business requirements for decision making and risk.

Whilst this model may not work for every organisation, it is a good example that you don't need to follow the letter of the ITIL books to achieve the objective of the processes: *"ensure that standardised methods and procedures are used for efficient and prompt handling of all Changes, in order to minimise the impact of Change-related Incidents upon service quality, and consequently to improve the day-to-day operations of the organisation"*. To me it re-enforces that the ITIL theory excels in telling you **WHAT** to do (and **WHY**) but that the **HOW** is very much up to the conditions of the organisation and their specific requirements!

Simon Dorst
Principal Consultant, Lucid IT
s.dorst@lucidit.com.au