

## Article: Is anyone home?

(Printed in ITSMF Australia Bulletin Winter 2006)

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## Anyone Home?

When I teach the IT Service Management framework (ITIL), more often than not I hear the phrase “this is just common sense”.

It makes me ponder two things:

1. How common is ‘common sense’?
2. If it is common sense, why is there so much resistance to it?

Since the ‘common sense’ aspect of ITIL seems to stem from recognition of what some people are doing, it surprises me that ITIL training is in such demand. I believe it is more the fact that what I teach brings some vague recollection of ‘this is what I was *told* I *should* be doing’ or ‘it makes sense that I *should* be doing this’. On the other hand, I can also picture the one or two Managers who have seen the light from ITIL elsewhere but are not being taken seriously in their workplace. Perhaps getting a ‘specialist’ in will convince the people that they need ITIL.

*“Common sense is sometimes regarded as an impediment to abstract and even logical thinking. This is especially the case in mathematics and physics, where human intuition often conflicts with provably correct or experimentally verified results. A definition attributed to Albert Einstein states: “Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.”* (Ref.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common\\_sense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_sense) 09.04.06). Therefore, it is plausible that ‘Common Sense’ is all the senses that we have picked up along the way in the places that we have worked.

This theory can be put to the test in places where people have worked for 20 years or so. Trying to implement something like ITIL in an environment like that is particularly difficult. Phrases such as *“common sense would dictate that as we’ve been doing things this way for 20 years without the business folding, we’re doing it right”* are, well, common. That smug sense of *“you can implement ITIL if you like as long as you don’t change the way we do things”* is quite confronting.

If in fact, common sense in the workplace *is* something we pick up in each place we work, those of us who have moved from job to job end up doing things in the way we found most comfortable in our previous places of business. As a result, people can start to feel as though they work in a place with no real control. They may become highly trained but despondent as their training is not put into practice. This often leads to high staff turnover, moonlighting or flippancy *“I’ll be there for them if and when they notice I’m here”!*

It’s as if someone has left the ‘home’ with the keys in the door that stands wide open. The people who live there are out, on their own agenda and no-one is keeping the house secure or doing the housework. As a result, the dust is building, people are escaping with the ‘good furniture’ and the leaves are blowing in although the house ‘appears’ tidy.

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I was astonished to hear one of my 'students' stating '*I've only heard bad things about ITIL; it's too hard*'. My astonishment was due to ITIL being blamed for, perhaps, an ill-managed implementation of the processes for which ITIL describes a framework. This same 'student' huffed when I said that ITIL process, for the most part, are simple to implement and ITIL's most endearing features are the 'quick wins' that implementation can provide. It seems to me that the simplicity of ITIL's message is being missed.

Perhaps the trap that we fall into is thinking that '*it can't be that simple, let's complicate it to make it seem more plausible*'.

For those who may need a simplistic approach to ITIL, here are some tips, on me!

1. Find out what you are already doing in a process driven way; don't reinvent the wheel, use the free ITIL Maturity Assessment to create a checklist
2. Identify the areas that may be causing you difficulties
3. Specify which IT teams are, should be or will be responsible for the areas identified in step 2
4. Prioritise the processes to be addressed first and, again using the maturity matrix, work out which activities you want to be doing to improve processes and identify some measurements (KPIs) to assess results weekly or monthly
5. Communicate with your staff – yes, *all* the staff, and I very much mean those at the bottom of the support chain on whom you rely to make these processes work!
6. Listen to ideas and create objectives for each of the support processes and find some 'champions' to ensure the activities identified in step 4 will be followed
7. Use the champions and committed IT Managers to create processes around the identified activities
8. Create some rules that must be followed and *NEVER* broken in order to assure the success of the processes
9. Now for the easiest bit, communicate your processes and your objectives to your IT Staff, customers and end-users of IT services. Explain the rules and the reasons for them.
10. Do not allow yourself to bypass the rules. If the rules are too tight, the process is wrong; remember, it should be easy, not 5 inch thick red tape. Review the process regularly and compare it to its objectives and KPIs. Adjust accordingly and reassess on a regular basis. (The Deming Cycle – Plan, Do, Check, Act!).

The key to your success lies in Leadership. IT Managers are all too often people who have worked in IT (usually on a technical level), long enough to 'earn' seniority. It's now time to put the emphasis on people and process management. Instil some confidence in your staff, allow ideas to come through, recognise skills and trust individuals. After all, your staff are your most precious assets, putting processes in is easy (as I've proved above); hiring and retaining the staff to deliver the desired results is the hard part. High staff turnover isn't going to improve matters and outsourcing isn't necessarily the answer.

Close the door, recognise the good furniture, get the dusting done regularly and let people establish roots so the leaves don't blow in; roots grow into big things, leaves get crushed, wither and blow out again.

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