What is ITIL?

I see this question once in a while, even from unexpected sources.
What is exactly ITIL and how can it help my company?

Introduction

Nowadays is important for any company to stay competitive. Achieving this is done with the business but also with IT, because both worlds are inseparably linked.

This means that any company needs to evolve both in its corporate and IT capabilities.

This is where ITIL comes in the picture.

What is ITIL?

ITIL stands for Information Technology Infrastructure Library. It's a set of **IT Service Management** (**ITSM**) practices that are proven and in place in large organisations around the world (IBM, NASA, Procter & Gamble, Boeing, Barclays, etc.).

It was developed by a UK Government Agency in the 80's.

ITIL focus on the management of services that are used to deliver value to the business. It is the standard for best practice in the provision of IT services, but not only (see below).

The current version of ITIL, introduces a service management lifecycle that highlights outcomes that must be achieved in order to successfully implement and manage IT services. This lifecycle orientation serves as a standard for managing Application Support services.

The word "service" popped up a lot in the previous paragraphs. But what is the definition of service in ITIL?

Services are ways of delivering value to customers, facilitating the outcome they want to achieve, without the ownership of specific costs and risks.

ITIL Lifecycle

The ITIL lifecycle is made of five phases:

- **Service Strategy**
	How to apply strategic thinking to IT service management and how to transform IT into a value service provider to the business.

- **Service Design**
	Focus on design services and how those services will support the business strategy. This is done by gathering service requirements from the business and understanding the capabilities and resources necessary to deliver and support the services.

- **Service Transition**
	In this phase, testing is conducted and any services or modifications that won't deliver the expected value can be pull back.
The purpose of this service is to maximise the business value of the IT services, manage risk and knowledge for decision support.

- **Service Operation**
	Day to day activities, processes and infrastructures responsible for delivering value to the business using technology. It covers the concept of service management as a practice, how to deal with organisational responsibilities and how to provide service.

- **Continual Service Improvement**
	The name is self-explanatory. It ensures that services are aligned with changing business needs by identifying and implementing improvement to IT services that support business processes.

The lifecycle is shown below:
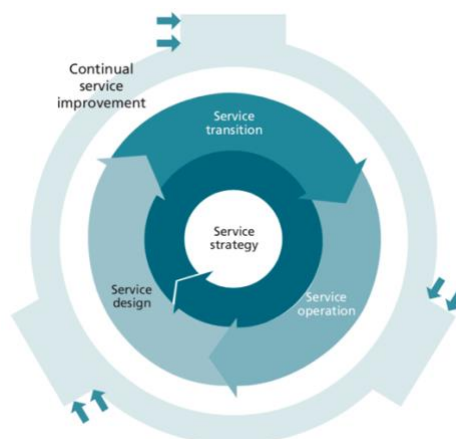
ITIL on "Non-IT" segments

Every company is looking to improve efficiency and reduce costs, but at the same time ensuring the best customer service (be the customers internal or external).

Since the 80's ITIL matured the way IT delivers the value to business. But ITIL can also help the business in other lines besides IT.

Using the same processes and tools across the business functions, makes the environment less complex but also helps reducing costs.

Where can ITIL help outside IT?

HR - From employee arrival to eventual dismissal, all the activities can be managed by similar approaches. Raising a hiring request, correction in a payroll, organizational structure updates, etc. an be managed using an ITSM tool.

Customer Service Management - Processes like Problem Management can help get to the root of the problem and models similar to Continual Service Improvement can be built to ensure the best customer satisfaction.

Project Management - There are other IT frameworks that can be used to manage projects, like Scrum but processes Strategy Management, Financial Management, Service Portfolio Management and Service Catalogue Management can be helped with ITIL approach.

The best practises from Service Transition can also help expanding business to a new area, a product launch or upgrading.

Alternatives to ITIL

ITIL just works! It's the framework with the biggest adoption rate. Why?
Because it's not based on a specific technology platform or industry type.
It's not tied to specific vendors.
ITIL delivers the accumulated knowledge and guidance from the best sources of service management practices around the world.
That said, there are out there a lot of alternatives available for those looking to apply an ITSM framework to their organization.
I will focus on the three I know better:

ASL - Application Services Library. Best practices, white papers, articles and presentations for implementation of application management.

COBIT - Control Objectives for Information and Related Technologies is a good practice framework created by international professional association ISACA for IT management and IT governance.

ISO 20000 - Global standard that describes the requirements for an information technology service management (ITSM) system. Developed by the British Standards Institutions (BSI), an international standard, testing and certification organization.

Questions

Questions? Do you want cool links regarding ITIL? Please contact me: Jorge Vilar