

1.5 Integrate project and IT service management for better quality of IT services

Project management brings major changes and innovation. IT service management promises quality and the fulfillment of needs. Their interactions are not always properly addressed - often leading to issues, conflicts and risks affecting the final quality of services. Integrate them to improve it!

Projects are the most common way to drive the introduction of major innovation and changes in the organizations. Project management is a mature discipline, adopted in many organizations in all domains, IT included. Here, in IT, it has evolved with the creation of one or more interacting Project Management Offices (often one for each major department). The project, through its leading roles (e.g. Project Board and Project Manager), is responsible for achieving the objective included in its scope and drives activities accordingly.

IT service management is the accepted discipline adopted to assure the alignment of IT services to their clients' needs and the quality of services. With ITIL® V3 and the introduction of the service lifecycle, service management deals more and more with service innovation and large scale changes: not only day-to-day activities but also important tasks such as new service creation become core parts of the model. Service management requires many roles to be established, often leading to the creation of specific functions, such as the Service Desk or the Change and Configuration Management Unit.

The introduction and growth of service management, with the establishment of the related new roles, may generate conflicts with the existing project management units. Some typical situations occurring are: the project ignores the service management processes and service operational requirements; it does not involve service management roles and functions from the beginning and it does not properly manage their contribution and communication. As a result, when the output of the project is passed to service management it is rejected or poorly managed with service quality issues. An alternative scenario is the "never ending project" where dedicated project teams continue operating the released systems after go-live, not aligned with service management practices. In this case you in fact see two separate service management domains, acting alongside each other.

A typical situation deriving from immature and/or poorly integrated processes is the following: the IT management has two independent views, *status of projects* and *status of services*, but the overall view of the IT situation is impossible or difficult and time consuming to build. For example, the total workload of resources is difficult to evaluate, and there are rumors and staff complaints about the fact that insufficient time is available to perform service management tasks, as well as insufficient time to perform project management activities, and for management it is difficult to understand the truth.

With the introduction of ITIL V3 and the service lifecycle concept, the importance of project management for the discipline has grown tremendously. In the framework, it is now recognised that project management is responsible for the creation of new services or for important changes to them. In the figure below, taken from the Service Design book, we see that the project is actually performing many important steps of the service lifecycle, e.g. design, transition.

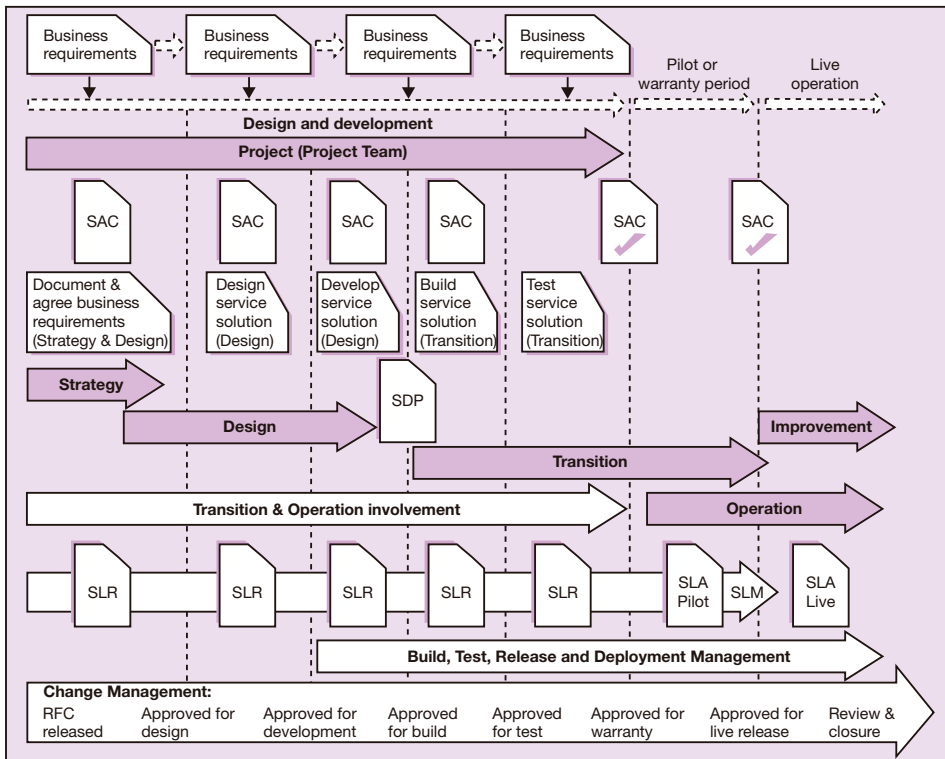


Figure 2 Relationships between project management and service lifecycle phases (Source: OGC, ITIL V3)

At the same time, service management defines principles, roles, processes and rules for such activities. These are deeply and carefully described in the new ITIL V3 books. For example, service acceptance criteria are well illustrated, and they should influence the structure of project phases and the definition of their project acceptance criteria.

In other words, service management not only claims to be involved as early as possible in project management, and to be continuously informed and contributing to it, but it also claims to influence project structure, management processes, such as decision-making, acceptance rules and criteria, etc. at least for IT projects. This may generate several conflicts. For example, the Project Management Office may resist accepting these changes, which are probably going to reduce project performances (costs and time), at least in their initial introduction phase and for on-going initiatives. The root cause of this is that the traditional project responsibilities (to deliver) and service management responsibilities (to manage) often have different owners. This is, for example, the typical case of application development projects. The Project Management Office of the Application Development Unit will probably

interact with the Service Management Team, mainly composed of Operations Department resources, having very different aims. Effectively, all that is not done at project time and with project budget shall be done later as a service management issue.

The power of the Project Management Office structure and its strength, to influence customers, is another element driving the conflicts too. The more it is relevant, the less the Project Management Office will be willing to accept external constraints affecting promises already given to the customers and changing behaviors.

As project management and service management are both important but different disciplines playing a significant role to improve the quality of IT services, what can be done to avoid or minimize the potential issues and conflict described?

The first action is to contaminate the different cultures. The Project Management Office team shall learn about service management and vice versa (service management staff shall learn about project management according to roles and responsibilities).

But this will not be enough. A main shift shall be defined in project management so that projects are including, as internal objective, the service management objectives. This means, for example, that the aim of a project should be to have a release running according to agreed availability or other agreed service levels, and not only to meeting original release schedules. Of course, the release shall also include all requested functional improvements, which is a traditional but important objective. This shift will also leverage all parties to define better communication channels and detailed interfaces between service management and project management activities, especially if economical reward is recognized to project teams based on these objectives.

A further effort should be to integrate supporting and reporting tools to supply IT higher management with comprehensive information and integrated functionalities. After all, the vast majority of IT activities can be referred either to service management or to project management tasks. Having the opportunity to plan resources on both types of activities with an integrated approach, checking their workload and having a complete overview of the results achieved (both quality of project and services) is the basis to establish the correct balance between the needed responsiveness and stability of the IT services.

It is difficult to imagine all projects under the responsibility of service management; it is also not desirable to have projects ignoring service management objectives. What is sure is that integrating the two disciplines, organizations, processes, activities and tools will be an important driver to increase the quality of IT services in the future and a major issue for those willing to introduce the service lifecycle. In conclusion, in the next couple of years, I expect that IT organizations will better integrate service management objectives and culture with those of traditional project management, to obtain better results and achieve superior quality of services.

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