The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of IT Service Management

What is the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of IT Service Management? The itSMF USA Heartland LIG put that question to its members at its August 2012 meeting, facilitated by Keith Sutherland of Service Management Dynamix.

First, let’s clarify the context. What is Service Management? The Cabinet Office defines Service Management as “a set of specialized organizational capabilities for providing value to customers in the form of services.” This definition would apply to any business that provides services to customers, such as restaurants, car rental, movie theatres, auto repair, etc. For the context of this paper, we are referring specifically to providing IT services.

When considering the three categories good, bad, and ugly; people generally have an understanding of what “good” would mean, but how do we distinguish “bad” from “ugly”. If we turn to a Google search for definitions, we find...

**Bad:** Of poor quality; inferior or defective: "a bad diet". Synonyms include: ill - evil - wicked - rotten - vicious - poor – nasty

**Ugly:** Unpleasant or repulsive, esp. in appearance: "she thought she was ugly and fat"; or (of a situation or mood) involving or likely to involve violence or other unpleasantness: “the mood in the room turned ugly”; or morally repugnant “racism and its most ugly manifestations, racial attacks and harassment”.

In summary, “bad” seems to indicate some inferiority in quality while “ugly” is an unpleasant condition or situation.

Given this information, the members were divided into three groups, each assigned the task of developing a list of words or phrases that indicated the good, the bad, and the ugly of IT Service Management. In this paper we present the resulting lists and provide recommendations on addressing the identified conditions.

**THE GOOD**

When we consider the “Good” of IT Service Management, the following words and phrases come to mind.

- Accountability
- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Consistency
- Control
- Quality
- Repeatability
- Measurability
- Transition
A question to consider related to the “good” is “What would we do to continue to do good things?” Just because we are observing some of these “good” characteristics does not mean we are done. We need to continue to monitor the metrics, even after the targets are being met in order to ensure we continue to maintain where we are in our maturity. Execute user surveys to gather feedback on process effectiveness, optimization, and to gather input on potential improvements.

Recognize or advertise what we do well. Let people know that we are doing good work and that it’s recognized and appreciated. Advertise and celebrate victories/success publicly in front of people. Get upper management involved in sending out the success messages. Success breeds success, so make sure people know what the successes are. This will help keep the momentum going. Also, continue to provide training, both for new users and existing users. Provide more advance training opportunities, especially opportunities to practice applying service management process in practical ways to real-life scenarios. Some techniques that can be applied to record/report success include:

- Publishing a monthly newsletter
- Provide a new website containing success stories
- Include information on what we are currently doing and what’s coming next
- Provide a blog or discussion site where people can log their own success stories
- Have an executive provide an award or special recognition of the “Success Story of the Month”

**THE BAD**

Often when enabling IT Service Management, things go badly. That is, the quality or results didn’t quite align with the expectations. Some of the quality concerns could include:

- Service Execution
- Process (Design/Strategy)
- Leadership (Buy-in)
- Integration
- Expensive
- Consistency
- Governance
- Tools
- Rewarding bad behavior

As a general comment, sometimes the execution by the Service was not as good as it could be. This could be the result of multiple factors like those listed above, or organizational culture issues. However, with some attention and effort, we can get good out of the bad.

Processes may be inadequate or poorly designed. Correction will require additional improvements to be made, or in some cases could require re-engineering of the process. People must know what the process strategy is and understand it. There needs to be a line of site from company goals to the
strategy. We must make sure the strategy and the alignment are clear. Otherwise it will get
misinterpreted resulting in processes that don’t support or align to the strategy.

Leadership buy-in implies money. It is not just giving lip service, but putting their money to it. An
organization is a reflection of their leadership. How many times when something goes bad do we go
back to the old ways? This can be an indicator of leadership’s buy-in to the framework. Desirable
leadership qualities include:

- Understanding the value proposition and applying it to a pain point
- Understanding that I can apply common sense to see the connection. i.e. that it’s a matter of
  how I apply ITSM knowledge, not just memorizing the theory
- Recognize it’s a matter of how I apply my ITSM knowledge to my work

There’s a tendency for us to place more trust in leaders that have been where we’re at (i.e. have been in
the trenches). This can also help them better see and articulate the value easier. A leader doesn’t have
to be the CIO. We can all be an agent of change and have a positive impact on people and the value
received from ITSM. There is a difference between awareness, training, and education. If people are
going to training “because my manager told me to”, then we need to improve on our organizational
change management to provide the students with more awareness and desire for ITSM.

Integration - processes should be integrated and working together. Overcoming the problem of poor
integration requires communications and sometimes re-engineering of the processes.

- Integrate service management with business processes to make it more effective. If we’re not
  providing value to the business, then there’s no point.
- People also need to understand how to apply the processes. You have to be connected from a
  business and IT perspective. There must be a line of site for people to the business.
- Have to answer the “What’s in it for me?” question for IT and the business – if not, it’s going to
  be ugly.
- Have to put policy in place then incent people to follow the policy.
- Integrate the processes through policy.

Expensive – the cost (time & money) was more than expected. However, failure to follow through on
fully enabling ITSM carries a cost in terms of impact to credibility. Standing up ITSM will be expensive
from a dollar perspective. To address this concern, tell the story and include:

- What’s the risk of not doing it?
- What’s the cost going to be of not doing it?
- Explain the cost of having only half the company doing it.
- Consider the cost of being compliant.
- Are there legal concerns or a cost of not being compliant?

Governance – lack of governance or not providing policy will impact the consistency and quality of
execution.
Rewarding bad behavior results when there is nothing detrimental for going outside the process or when there is no reward for doing the right thing. By not addressing the bad behavior, it ends up rewarding the behavior. Is firefighting being rewarded rather than rewarding effective problem management? You can tell the culture of the organization by who gets rewarded.

The tool is not available or not working properly. This discourages people from following the process. Too often we retrofit the process to the tool rather than making the tool support the process. Still, the tool is important. We have a dependence on the tool because we can’t remember all the details about the process. The necessary time and resources need to be allocated to ensure the tool provides the functionality required to help enable effective and efficient processes for the practitioners.

**THE UGLY**

Sometimes the situation or conditions surrounding the ITSM implementation end up turning ugly. Some examples include:

- Poorly run or un-communicated changes
- Taking on more that you’re capable of handling
- Testing, lack of
- Knee jerk reaction
- Failure to understand current state
- Lack of Critical Success Factors
- Resistance to change
- Inefficient Organizational Change Management
- Lack of understanding of terminology
- Lack of execution
- Lack of research
- ITIL Bible Thumpers
- Implementation of process without understanding the value
- Common Sense (lack of)

Poorly run, non-communicated changes – To overcome this we need to plan better. What’s the risk? The risk is having unsatisfied customers, loss of revenue, loss of brand, legal issues, and loss of confidence. This could manifest in an unwanted reaction. We could end up punishing those that are doing it right because of someone else by over-reacting and making the process overbearing. We should advertise why we’re taking the action. Change is about control and we need to regain control. When things don’t go well, publicize what happened and how we can do better. Learn from what happened so we don’t repeat it.

Taking on more than you’re capable of handling – One way this is expressed by people taking on more process assignments than they can effectively perform with quality. Saying we’re going to implement ITIL tomorrow, across the board, is also taking on more than can actually be handled. At some point, common sense must prevail. We’re going to struggle if we try and get it all done too fast or try and take on too much. Reorganize to make it happen. We may have to continue to monitor commitment levels to keep people fresh.

Lack of testing – Considerations to ensure quality testing is performed include:

- How much does the customer want it?
• How much will they fund it?
• Test bed is not robust enough - doesn’t align to production.
• Not thorough enough at defining test cases.
• Not allowing enough time to do the testing.
• Not working with the business to clearly understand what it expects.
• Poor requirements.

Knee jerk reaction - put it in place, but it didn’t work one time so they went back to the prior approach. Leadership should expect failure sometimes. Allow time to analyze the failures to identify opportunities for improvement. Don’t jump to a conclusion and take rash action. Don’t discard the process or change the process based solely on a single incident.

Current state should be a benchmark to compare the results of process improvements.

Lack of Critical Success Factors – Putting in KPIs without understanding the Critical Success Factors (CSFs). This causes a loss of the line of site to the desired results. Critical success factors are those activities required to ensure the desired results are achieved. KPIs are the measurements used to monitor the progress or status of the CSFs. If we simply select KPIs without the other two, there is no guarantee that the results will be achieved. Very often, we end up driving the wrong behavior. People may not execute on the CSFs because they don’t understand the value it will provide to the business or how it helps achieve the result targets. Be sure the CSFs and related KPIs align to the desired results and drive the right behaviors.

Resistance to change – People can be resistant to change because we did not answer the “what’s in it for me?” question. People voluntarily make changes all the time in their lives, but resist changes they don’t understand or were not advised of in advance. This is why it’s important to address the question. This is an opportunity to reinforce the desired attitudes, behavior, and culture needed to make the change successful.

Inefficient OCM – Keep the OCM team in place as long as they need to be to make sure the initiative succeeded – and that it comes back to check up. Too often we put an OCM team together, but don’t give them enough time and latitude to make OCM successful. We may bring in a consultant to get OCM started, but then don’t have them see it through to completion or do the follow-up to ensure long term success. Sometimes we have people that are unwilling to leave the burning building. The team needs to be enabled to apply ADKAR or similar practices to help people want to change. This can be difficult for an internal team when hard messages have to be delivered (i.e. messages people really don’t want to hear). Sometimes it’s better to have someone from the outside deliver the OCM message due to fear of retribution for the internal team.

Terminology – Don’t understand the terms or have different meanings for the terms. Be sure terms are clearly defined and used properly in context. Sometimes poor communication covers up good things/good ideas. Look to improve communications to ensure the message is delivered clearly and processes are understood and usable.
Lack of research - Sometimes it’s just somebody’s idea with no research to back it up, but it becomes implemented anyway. Use opportunities to check with other companies and experienced practitioners to learn from the experiences of others. Use ITIL and other reliable references for advice. Require those suggesting improvements to identify the value the change will provide to users and to the company overall. Take a holistic view to the use of IT Service Management.

ITIL Bible Thumpers – People who want to implement ITSM exactly like ITIL defines it. Be sure to keep the ITSM processes within the context of the company. ITIL provides a summary of industry best practices as a reference for identifying improvements to the processes of the company. It doesn’t mean everything must or should be executed exactly as ITIL describes it. Within the context of the company, it may be more practical or effective to adjust the process. Start with existing processes and agree to execute them consistently. Then use ITIL as a reference to identify improvements that provide benefit to the company in terms of value, outcomes, cost savings, or risk management. Do not implement process changes without understanding the value they will provide.

**SUMMARY**

In summary, there are a lot of good things that come from well implemented IT Service Management. However, there will always be some things that go bad or turn ugly. That’s not reason to scrap the plan, it’s just an opportunity to analyze what went wrong and make improvements. Consider the “bad” and “ugly” as triggers for continuous service improvement. Learn from them and turn them into successes that bring even greater value and outcomes for the IT Services.

Submitted by: itSMF USA Heartland LIG

Author: Kevin L Ritter, LIG President