ITIL CERTIFICATION COST & BENEFIT ANALYSIS

If you work in IT, you've likely heard of or worked with ITIL. Perhaps you've even considered pursuing ITIL certifications. But is the investment worth the return? We're taking a look at the cost of ITIL certifications at various levels and the benefits you can expect, so you can decide whether it's an appropriate investment for you and your business.

What is ITIL?

ITIL refers to a [detailed set of practices for managing IT service management](#), commonly known as ITSM. These practices apply to any type or size of organization that wants to align IT with severally business strategy, while delivering value and maintaining a minimum competency level. ITIL practices include a range of processes and procedures, tasks, and checklists that aid in demonstrating compliance, measuring improvement, and avoiding common pitfalls – all to deliver the best quality services to the end user.

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The preeminent ITSM and service delivery framework across the globe, ITIL is currently owned and maintained by AXELOS, a joint venture between Capita and the United Kingdom's Cabinet Office. (Note that ITIL used to be shorthand for Information Technology Infrastructure Library, but today it's known primarily and officially as ITIL.)

ITIL is used across the world and in a wide variety of industries, with internationally known companies like IBM, HBSC, and even NASA implementing ITSM strategies. For many companies, the biggest benefits of ITIL are its versatility and scalability: companies can take as little or as much as they'd like from ITIL, and they can also combine it with practices that follow other popular frameworks like Six Sigma, COBIT, and TOGAF.

Pursuing ITIL certifications

While you can certainly study up or apply ITIL principles and practices in your own company, you can also pursue official ITIL certifications, which indicate familiarity, knowledge, and even mastery of ITIL principles put into practice. Importantly, ITIL certifications are available only to individuals, not to an entire organization. For instance, if a company claims they are ITIL certified, they may in fact comply with a related, but different, standard of the ISO/IEC 20000, or they may simply be promoting any number of employees within the company do hold ITIL certifications.

Levels of ITIL certifications

So how does certification work? ITIL certification is divided into five levels of certifications. One person may only seek an entry- or medium-level certification, while a project manager or CIO may seek to obtain Expert or Master status in ITIL. Of five levels, the first four levels are based on number of credits and passing examinations. Reaching the Expert certification, the 4th-highest level, requires 22 combined credits. Achieving the ultimate Master level, however, does not rely on credits and instead has its own criteria.

Here are the five ITIL certification levels:

Foundation: the entry level. With no pre-requisites, anyone can sit for this exam.

Practitioner: this second level is the newest addition to ITIL certifications. Sitting for this exam requires passing the Foundation level. This level is not a pre-requisite for upper level certifications, but its 3 credits upon passing do count towards the overall credits needed for Expert certification.

Intermediate: this level is based on modules within two categories. Candidates can choose topics within both categories:

- Service Lifecycle, with modules focused on Service Strategy, Service Design, Service

Transition, Service Operation, and Continual Service Improvement.

- Service Capability, with modules focused on Operational Support and Analysis; Planning, Protection, and Optimization; Release, Control, and Validation; and Service Offerings and Agreements.

Expert: pre-requisites include 17 credits from the previous 3 levels. Passing the Managing Across the Lifecycle (MALC) exam grants an additional 5 credits, making a student eligible for the Master-level certification with 22 credits.

Master: the ultimate ITIL certification, a candidate must demonstrate ITIL mastery by completing Expert certification (22 credits minimum), demonstrating minimum 5 years' experience in a management or leadership role, submitting a proposal for ITIL service improvement, submitting a work package wherein the candidate successfully applied ITIL practices to a real-world business case, and completing an interview with an ITIL assessment panel.

Pricing of ITIL certifications

Current ITIL owner Axelos oversees and maintains the ITIL framework and accredits training and exam institutions. [There are hundreds of ITIL accredited training organizations (ATOs) that deliver training and certification examinations](), which are available on the Axelos website.

A candidate for ITIL certification may choose from certification providers who are accredited by AXELOS for providing the training and examinations. Non-accredited providers may cost less, but their content and results may not be as reliable or vouched for. Pricing varies depending on country you reside and whether you're taking an in-person course, online option, or an in-house training within your company. Candidacy for the Master-level certification alone is $4,000.

Benefits of ITIL certifications

Digital services are the de facto product these days: more and more companies are buying into – and selling – digital services, instead of tangible, heavy, customized options. Digital services typically rely on ongoing project management that focus on the service's objectives while also paying attention to inevitable issues in developing, delivering, and maintaining the service. A good IT service management approach is knowing exactly how to integrate all these ever-changing factors into your development process.

As ITIL strives to address this inherent potential and risk, common business advantages that result in an ITIL approach include:

- Decreasing time, money, and other resources spent on the entire service development lifecycle
- Improving the overall quality of the end product
- Boosting staff morale
- Increasing customer satisfaction.

Businesses may see explicit improvements, too, such as:

- A better, more tangible understanding of your customers, their needs, and their expectations
- Development of a guide that predicts and reacts to a service's issues
- Increased productivity

- Improvement management of resourced
- Risk management that minimizes or prevents service disruption
- A stable development environment that isn't rigid, allowing for flexibility
- Better alignment across IT and other business departments

Considerations for ITIL certification

Industry experts as well as those certified in ITIL often agree that certification behooves both the individual and the company. A recent survey of [117 people who have earned at least intermediate-level ITIL certification](#) found the following:

- 76% of those surveyed said that intermediate and advanced certifications made them more marketable, and nearly 59% said that they were better able to compete with an intermediate-level ITIL certification.
- 70% reported developing new knowledge and expertise. (This is significant because a common complaint of ITIL certification maintains that new knowledge acquisition is rare.)
- 55% felt they had improved their overall effectiveness on the job, and 47% reported that their employees improved efficiency in cost and time. (This indicates that an ITIL-certified employee may have a larger impact on colleagues and teams.)
- 23.5% felt that their knowledge helped employees improve their overall risk management. (This is surprisingly low, especially when many proponents of ITIL say that certification can help mitigate risk.)

Large, global companies can often more easily justify the cost of ITIL certifications for a number of employees. In such companies, it's common for any IT professional, from sysadmins to project managers to CIOs, to obtain some level of ITIL certification. These same companies often also have dedicated ITIL coaches and mentors.

Small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), on the other hand, often have a hard time justifying the cost of fully certifying and implementing ITIL. But experts say these SMBs may want to consider the opposite: a failed IT project is often much more disastrous to your bottom line than the proactive approach of ITIL certification.

It may never be a complete guarantee that an ITIL certification is worth the investment, both for you and your company. With anything, you'll often get out of the process exactly what you put into it. But, because ITIL builds on previous experience, you can try it out with entry-level certifications before fully committing to the long-term promise of ITIL Mastery.