

WHAT IS ITSM? IS IT STILL RELEVANT IN THE DIGITAL AGE?



ITSM is dead, long live ITSM!

The traditional approach to IT service management is thrashing about in its dying kicks. ITSM continues to ride along on a stubborn culture that refuses to evolve in the face of the 4th industrial revolution when almost all organizations have [digital transformation](#) at the heart of their strategies.

Are we still persisting with tickets, SLAs, and [CABs](#) in an age of DevOps, AI, and IoT? What's next for ITSM in the 2020s? In this article, I give a brief definition of ITSM as context for how and why ITSM frameworks and approaches are shifting—or not—in the digital age.

What's ITSM?

Short for IT service management, ITSM includes all the activities, policies, and processes that organizations use for deploying, managing, and improving IT service delivery. – [Joe Hertvik](#)

ITSM has existed for decades—since we began using technology to [deliver services](#). But, today, we are seeing a transitional approach that tries to do two things at once:

1. Extract the good from the past, such as [service desk](#) and [incident management](#).
2. Embrace new digital realities, which are characterized by a technology first delivery that is customer centric at heart and agile in operation.

[According to Kirstie Magowan](#), organizations and people need to stop considering IT service

management as its own silo that delivers technology solutions. Instead, we need to think about service management holistically, as a key vehicle for delivering business value—not just IT value.



ITSM frameworks reflect this shift

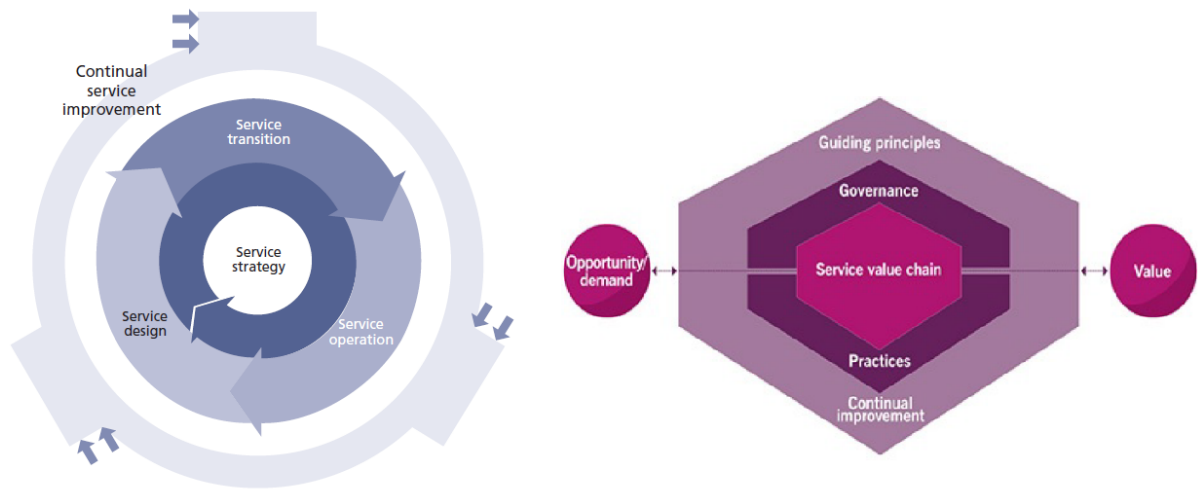
There have been many service management frameworks and standards in existence over the last 30 years. And you'd better believe that they are not going away anytime soon.

Let's look at how some of the [main ITSM frameworks](#) have evolved over time, especially with a view of the digital age.

ITIL®

If there is a framework that has refused to die in the face of the digital age, it is ITIL. Many in the field held the opinion that [ITIL version 3](#) was no longer fit for purposes, especially in a cloud-centric environment where agile and DevOps are mainstay.

But, through a crowdsourced effort, [ITIL 4](#) has breathed new life into this aging framework, introducing a modern digital operating model that is practical and flexible for not only IT professionals but anyone working in this new world.



ITIL v3 Service Lifecycle vs ITIL 4 SVS ([Source](#))

Launched in 2019, the main changes in ITIL 4 include:

- Replacing the service lifecycle with a [service value system \(SVS\)](#) that embraces an end-to-end ecosystem for value creation through products and services.
- Introducing a [service value chain model](#) at the heart of the SVS that is a flexible operating model for the creation, delivery, and continual improvement of services.
- Transitioning from a process-centric approach to practices within the SVS that support the service value chain activities and are anchored in the wider context of customer experience, value streams, and digital transformation.
- Embracing modern practices such as [Agile](#), [Lean](#), and [DevOps](#).

So far, the response to this update has been positive, with general agreement that ITIL 4 has addressed most of the criticism it faced—especially with the narrow process focus and failure to keep up with modern technology trends.

As more people train and ITIL 4 implementation starts in earnest, we wait to see whether real benefits result and if new challenges will emerge.

([Learn more about how ITIL supports ITSM.](#))

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ISO 20000

[ISO/IEC 20000:2018](#) is the current version of the international standard on service management. This is the third version, with the previous versions based on the now obsolete BS 15000 and ITIL v3.

While this standard is general to [enterprise service management](#), as it is developed by a technical committee, it is widely acknowledged as being very applicable to ITSM—despite being process focused, not technology centric.

In the new version, one of the main changes is incorporation of growing trends in service management, including topics such as:

- The commoditization of services
- The management of multiple suppliers by an internal or external service integrator
- The need to determine value of services for customers

In addition, the new version has removed some documented information requirements, detail requirements such as CMDB, and certain plans. This allows organizations more freedom in meeting the requirements, especially from a technology perspective.

These changes, I believe, are a concerted attempt to:

- Embrace modern ways of working
- Facilitate digital technology enablers such as mobile and cloud
- Ensure different organizations can be certified regardless of where they are in their technology evolution

While statistics are not yet available, it is obvious that ISO would want more organizations to be certified. That's why flexibility is a key driver for this standard.

COBIT

While [COBIT](#) isn't formally an IT service management framework, it essentially provides a framework for the governance of information and technology. A closer look at its governance/management objectives and components reveals lots of similarities with ITIL 4 practices and ISO 20000 processes.

[COBIT 2019](#) is the sixth iteration of this 20-year-old framework. One reason for updating it was to align it to global standards, frameworks, and best practices in order to enhance its relevancy.

One of the main updates is the introduction of focus areas, which describe a certain governance topic, domain, or issue that can be addressed by a collection of governance and management objectives and their components. Some of the focus areas include modern IT trends such as:

- Cybersecurity
- Digital transformation
- Cloud computing
- Privacy
- DevOps

The COBIT 2019 update has designed these focus areas to be open ended. That allows for new focus areas to be added in the future as technology evolves.

Long live service management

Apart from the three listed frameworks, we have other ITSM frameworks:

- [VeriSM](#)
- [IT4IT](#)
- [DCMM](#)
- [USM](#)
- [FitSM](#)

As technology remains central to modern service delivery, it seems unlikely that we will see a death to ITSM frameworks. I foresee both a continual evolution as well as new entrants, even as industry knowledge continues to expand in order to keep abreast of modern trends.

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Additional resources

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- [The State of ITSM in 2020](#)
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- [ITSM and AI: How AI Is Changing IT Service Management](#)
- [AIOps Leverages Natural Language Processing for Service Tickets](#)
- [The Organizational Death Spiral: See It, Avoid It](#)