

Is ITIL only about infrastructure management? Guidance and misguidance.

For many years I've read statements on ITIL being only about infrastructure management. These statements were mostly coming from the followers of 'competing' frameworks like ASL and BiSL. As long as these frameworks were only used in the Netherlands, little harm was done. The Dutch are known to be sober and relatively framework-agnostic, and a small local battle between framework followers couldn't do much damage. However, lately, some of these Dutch frameworks are being used in other countries as well, and people are now confronted with the same reasoning as in the previously local Dutch debate. Time for a warning.

Recently, in one of the LinkedIn groups on this topic, we could again read the statement about ITIL being about **infrastructure management** and only used by *infrastructure service providers*. This is a wide spread misunderstanding. In fact, I believe that many of the ASL followers do not WANT to know what ITIL is really about: they ignore the valid arguments time upon time.

ITIL has been about **service management** from day 1. It described practices and - to some level - processes and generic procedures that were commonly used for delivering IT services. And yes - there was a focus on the IT component of the services, but it has always been in the context of service management.

By the way: applications are "technology infrastructure", just like systems and facilities ;-)

In the Netherlands, [ASL](#) was developed in the late nineties as an attempt to commercialize the instruments of a specific Dutch provider - and I know because I was there when the idea to do so was launched the very first time. ASL describes the service management system of an application management organization, reducing the role and position of ITIL to the **systems management** domain. That way, it completely ignores the true nature of ITIL, creating a relatively more important position for application management. In doing so, it doesn't do justice to itself nor to ITIL, and it actually is an exponent of infrastructure thinking: "*applications are more important than the technology systems they run on*".

The last thirty years we have learned to understand that applications and technology are both crucial components of the IT service, just like the people, the documentation, and the facilities. If either one of these components fails, the service fails. Applications are important, yes, but not more important than the rest of the components of an IT service. And ASL is actually only competing ITIL for turf in the supply domain.

A more meaningful contribution from a Dutch framework comes from [BiSL](#). This framework describes practices in a domain that is largely ignored by ITIL: the domain that we tend to call "demand", "information management", or lately "business information management". This is a specific view that is unique for the Netherlands. I've visited many countries and always inquired the way people looked at this domain, but I've never found it in any country but the Netherlands. It is based on the **Separation Of Duty** principle in the information domain, as first applied by prof. Maarten Looijen in the late eighties. If you want to understand how this principle had led to the domains where ASL, ITIL and BiSL are finding their positions as best practice frameworks, describing activities in the various domains, I advise you to read the SAME Model ([free download](#)).

Once you understand the nature of the two domains, you can immediately see the nature and the position of the three frameworks mentioned above:

1. ITIL describes the service management *practices* of an IT service provider in the information supply domain
2. ASL describes the service management *practices* of an IT service provider in the information supply domain *focused on application management*
3. BiSL describes the *practices* of a service provider in the information demand domain.

Even in the Netherlands, the third domain is not really professionalized, in terms of well known organization structures that deliver easily understood contributions to the information services in an organization. Most of the support for this domain is - like in the supply domain - limited to *best practices*. And we've seen what best practice frameworks have caused for the entire information landscape. Nevertheless, I'm totally sure that this (third) domain will be one of the most important areas for future development, and I'll deliver some more columns on the major steps in that development.