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Frameworks and Standards to Consider When Evaluating Providers' Delivery Methods

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Enterprises should not underestimate the relevance of delivery methodologies and related industry standards and frameworks (see Note 1 for a definition of each), like ITIL, ISO20000, eSCM, and Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI), when evaluating and selecting a spectrum of business and IT service providers. These may include delivery of consulting and system integration work or outsourcing across infrastructure, applications, business process or cloud services. Regardless of the service category, it is imperative to have a critical review of the methodology and standards.

External service providers (ESPs) who have a proven delivery methodology or use service delivery processes based on recognized industry frameworks and standards have a significantly better chance of delivering the deal outcomes you require in a more cost-effective and timely manner.

This analysis identifies what the key industry frameworks and standards are by service category and how you should integrate this into your evaluation and selection process.

Key Findings

- When evaluating and selecting ESPs, the adoption of proven delivery methodologies and/or industry standards and frameworks provides a useful guide as to their likely track record as well as their likely service maturity and service culture.

- The use of standards and frameworks is a key indicator of rigor, consistency and overall investment on the part of providers to ensure the highest level of quality of their service delivery methods.

- The industry standards and frameworks that are applicable vary considerably by service area. For example, while ITIL is relevant to continuous services like ITO and BPO, CMMI is relevant to application services.

Recommendations

- When evaluating and selecting ESPs, use the maturity of their service delivery processes as a basis of shortlisting/differentiating their capability to deliver the required deal outcomes.

- For mature continuous services (IT outsourcing, applications outsourcing [AO], business process outsourcing) assess the maturity of ESPs' delivery methodologies according to their degree of adoption of and track record in using relevant industry frameworks/standards.

- For mature discrete consulting, application development and system integration assignments assess whether ESPs have proven methodologies, toolkits and industry templates and related track record. Assess their architecture, quality and project management capabilities against proven industry frameworks.

- For less mature services, focus on the evolution of repeatable, consistent and reliable delivery processes and whether ESPs have a knowledge management system and are demonstrably investing in evolving their delivery methodology.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 What You Need to Know

When evaluating outsourcing, consulting, system integration or cloud service providers, their ability to deliver services consistently, reliably, flexibly and in accordance with any regulatory requirements is critical. For mainstream service requirements (addressing solutions that have passed through the "Trough of Disillusionment" in Gartner Hype Cycle terms), avoid using ESPs with immature service delivery models or those that don't have a high degree of compatibility with recognized industry standards and frameworks.

Review the maturity and track record of ESPs' delivery methodologies during market scans to eliminate less suitable, higher risk ESPs. These findings can also be a way of differentiating ESP capabilities in the subsequent detailed evaluation and selection process. Also take into account your own maturity — if you are low in maturity, seek an ESP whose capabilities are more mature, but not too disparate so they can expedite your internal capabilities development (see Note 2).

This note aims to assist enterprises in understanding the positioning of the diverse array of industry frameworks, standards and regulations and their applicability in service delivery methods and resulting considerations of providers' capabilities in any evaluation and selection process.

It also aims to provide enterprises with the information to determine which international standards and frameworks are relevant for the particular service categories they intend to source externally.

1.2 Which International Standards and Industry Frameworks Should You Consider?

There are many international standards that partially overlap each other and have different reach and impact as illustrated in Figure 1.
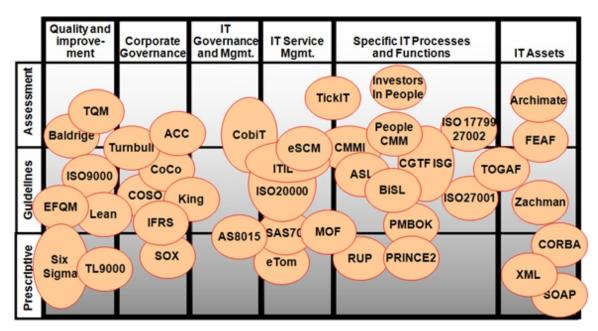
Figure 1. Positioning of International Standards and Industry Frameworks

Source: Gartner (May 2010)

All these standards and frameworks impact services on different levels and with different goals and thus it can be difficult for client organizations to understand which of these standards are relevant to the services they intend to outsource. In this research we limit our analysis to the most widely accepted and applied international standards which can be independently audited.[1, 2]

The following sections address which standards and regulations commonly apply to across all IT services and which apply to specific service categories.[3]

2.0 Standards and Regulations That Apply to all Service Categories

In the delivery of services by ESPs, the most commonly and widely applicable international standards, frameworks and regulations are segmented into three areas, as follows.

2.1 Cross Service Elements — Quality and Security Management

Quality Management standard ISO9001[4] — The first and most widely applied standard. It describes quality management processes that have allowed ESPs to better standardize, "processsize" and industrialize their service delivery. The standard is kept up to date by the International Organization for Standardization (IOS) and is currently at ISO9001:2008. ESPs are audited and certified against the standards by independent auditors and organizations should validate the certification in their selection process.

Quality Management framework Six Sigma[5] — More used in traditional service environments and lean quality management (expanded from manufacturing to support agile service environments). These frameworks refer to the process review and refinement processes client organizations and

ESPs need for any service delivery framework. Both are strongly focused on continuous improvement in behavior and processes, which makes them important additions to ISO standards and organizations should consider ESPs that apply these frameworks when they are focused on innovation in combination with high efficiency standards.

Information Security standard ISO27001[6] **—** This standard specifies an Information Security Management System (ISMS) that forms the basis for organizations and ESPs to optimize the reliability and predictability of services. It focuses on guidelines that manage access to and processing of information.[7]

Information Security standard ISO27002[8] **—** Based on the British Standard BS7799 it was formalized as ISO17799 and rebadged as ISO27002 as it closely relates to ISO27001. It provides more information on security techniques and a code of practice for information security management. Organizations should consider this standard with ESPs as they apply it to create security policies and guidelines that apply to the service delivery technology and staff behavior and support SAS 70 type 2 regulatory requirements.

2.2 Internal Service Management Elements

The following frameworks are ones that a client organization would typically use in their internal IT governance and in engaging with ESPs.

Internal control framework CoBit[9] **—** This framework is now in version 5.0. It addresses organizations' and ESPs' internal governance through business and IT controls and has a range of recommended processes for managing ESPs and delivering business outcomes for the contracted services. This framework is especially useful when organizations have implemented it themselves as it will improve communication with ESPs and help them do better supply management to match your demand management functions. It combines well with ISO standards.

Sourcing management framework eSCM[10] **—** The Carnegie Mellon eSourcing Capability Model for client organizations (e-SCM-CL) provides a high-level framework and model for sourcing organizations looking to improve their sourcing capabilities.[11] The equivalent model for ESPs is e-SCM-SP. Organizations that apply eSCM-CL should validate ESPs on the eSCM-SP level implementation as it maximizes demand and supply alignment on an operational and tactical level.

Enterprise Architecture framework TOGAF[12] **—** The Open Group Architecture Framework (TOGAF) is an open framework that describes architecture from a business, an information and a technology viewpoint, resulting in three architectures that combine to describe an enterprise architecture. In principle, all processes, information flows and technology are designed to accommodate the realization of a business strategy and more specific defined business outcomes. [13] TOGAF is currently at version 9.0 and follows an enterprise life cycle approach which can be applied at enterprise level, but also allows a similar approach at each of the viewpoints and at an increased granularity. Organizations that apply TOGAF will have a stronger focus on how technology and services support business outcomes and direct toward business process service

key performance indicators. Such organizations will validate ESPs against their enterprise architecture maturity.

2.3 Industry-Specific Audit and Compliance Requirements

Internal control framework COSO[14] **—** This framework is recommended by the SEC to guide corporate compliance with the SOX (Sarbanes-Oxley Act) section 404.[15] COSO addresses three objectives at the detailed level of processes on an organizational entity level (like a department): effectiveness and efficiency of operations (including safeguarding of assets), reliability of financial reporting, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Organizations that apply COSO need to validate ESP adherence to it to align with the SOX requirements.

Auditing compliance standard Statement on Auditing Standards (SAS) 70[16] — SAS 70 is an auditing compliance standard that is applied to validate controls for industry regulations such as a financial firm's compliance to SOX. SAS 70 type 2 report is the most widely requested auditing report from organizations of ESPs. The type 2 report requires ESPs to prove they not only have implemented all the required controls, but that these controls have been effective for at least the last six months. Organizations need to ensure ESPs align to their audited controls.

Others

Other prominent compliance requirements include U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requirements as well as for logistic firm's compliance with drug control laws. There are many more local, regional or industry regulations that can impact a company. (for a broader range see[17]).

3.0 Standards and Frameworks That Apply to Specific Service Categories

The aforementioned standards and frameworks apply across all types of services as they address general service, quality and security management and internal control and governance. Organizations need to maximize these standards to optimize the reliability and predictability of their services and products. These, however, do not suffice when sourcing specific types of services.

3.1 Infrastructure Services Outsourcing

Without any doubt, the key framework and standards that apply when outsourcing infrastructure services are ITIL (currently version 3)[18] or ISO20000.[19] These address detailed operational and tactical service management processes, inclusive roles and responsibilities of the demand and supply side of the services.

In version 3 of ITIL there is an enhanced focus on relationship management and business involvement. ISO20000 is similar to ITIL but is more widely applied in the U.S., while ITIL has had a stronger traction in Europe. ITIL certifies on a personal level versus ISO certification which is at an entity level (department, unit). Often organizations and ESPs have implemented both approaches, including global and offshore ESPs. When organizations outsource infrastructure services they should always ask what level of ITIL implementation and the ISO certifications ESPs hold.

Underperforming or lacking or very limited certification (for example, only a specific department that addresses only part of the services) are seen as clear disqualifiers of prospective ESPs.

For related technical projects consider Prince2[20] and PmBok.[21] These two Program and Project Management frameworks are the most widely spread, where Prince2 is predominantly used in Europe and PmBok is more common in the U.S. Both frameworks provide the process, templates, tools and roles and responsibilities for managing programs and projects through their complete life cycle from initiation, through planning, execution to evaluation. Organizations that outsource services should especially focus on these frameworks for the transition phase and during operational enhancements or technology transformation projects.[22]

3.2 Application Services — Application Maintenance and Support, and Operations Services

Application Operations (addressing the application hosting layers and supporting middleware) and Application Maintenance and Support (addressing corrective, adaptive, preventive and perfective maintenance) are all based on continuous service delivery. Thus the same standards and frameworks apply for these services as they do for infrastructure outsourcing.

As applications are closer to the business, they also require better business-facing processes, which has resulted in for example the Benelux initiative Application Services Library (ASL) and Business Information Services Library (BiSL).[23] These build on ITIL but have a stronger focus on business alignment, service integration, change and release management. These frameworks are certified at personal and organization entity level.

The need for continuous improvement of application development performance and efficiency is addressed by the CMMI framework.[24] This framework certifies organizational entities rather than individuals and refers to the level of certification as a level of maturity in applying the CMMI principles. Organizations that have implemented CMMI as a means to improve their application development processes should validate ESPs against their CMMI-SVC (CMMI for Services) maturity level. Organizations that rate themselves immature in application development often act on maturity level 1, where mature organizations commonly reside at level 3. Many ESPs claim their capabilities are certified at level 5, which is the maximum, especially in their global delivery centers. This means development has been broken down to a very granular level and roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, assigned and managed against. Continuous improvement of performance and efficiency is at the core of that organization.

However, less mature organizations that outsource and consider working with a level 5 ESP, should first upgrade their internal maturity levels, as the difference in their internal way of working and CMMI-L5 is quite disparate. Consider seeking an ESP whose capabilities are more mature, but not too disparate so they can expedite your internal capabilities development.[25]

3.3 Application Services: Application Implementation and Development Services, Packaged Applications

This section also includes analysis pertinent to both applications outsourcing and system integration offerings which are typically used by enterprises in the delivery of these services.

As reflected in the survey conducted in 2009[2], a comprehensive, or at a minimum — a focused package delivery methodology is a critical requirement that organizations impose on ESPs, as well as very good program and project management skills (PMBok/Prince2). The large packaged-based independent software vendors (ISVs) have created their own methodology frameworks and related industry templates to optimize the implementation of their software. The SAP implementation framework for example is ASAP, Oracle has AIM for its applications and Microsoft has SureStep for Dynamics AX implementations. Implementation frameworks build on proper program and project management best practices but adapt these to the specifics of the respective packaged application. They aim to draw out the inherent best practices of the software solution as well as provide guidelines for employing key milestones in solution implementations.

When outsourcing or using system integrators for the implementation of the packaged application; organizations should consider if there is a best practice framework for the implementation of the respective package. If there is such a framework suitable for this initiative, organizations should validate ESPs (for the implementation) against this and their referenced experience. If there is not, organizations should consider whether the ESPs methodology has:

- A range of consistent analysis and design/blueprinting processes.

- A set of consistent activities to be undertaken for which there are well defined sets of tasks.

- Elements like unit, integration, security and performance testing along with pilot and general roll out project templates.

Typically for each package or solution area, organizations can expect ESPs to have industry-specific configuration templates, tools and methods with a range of predefined industry-based best practice processes that can be tailored to your enterprise. The more experienced the ESP, the more sophisticated their templates are expected to be (including use and test cases), and the more skilled resources, adapted processes and tools they will have to simplify and further shorten the implementation.[26]

3.4 Application Services: Application Implementation and Development Services, Customized Applications

In regard to customized applications, organizations combine program and project standards mostly with Carnegie Melon's CMMI. As explained above, this approach provides organizations (CMMI-DEV for development and CMMI-AQM for acquisition of services) as well as ESPs (CMMI-SVC for services) with a framework on how to deliver quality outcomes at the required level of maturity. However, because it focuses on how, organizations need to ensure that their validation of ESP experience takes into account the nature of the application development.

For example:

- Consider agile standards for service-oriented architecture (SOA)-based projects. Most legacy interoperability applications (like enterprise services business applications), as well as most current Web applications are based on SOA principles and require more agile standards. Examples are architected rapid application development (ARAD) processes for service-oriented development of applications (SODA) or agile application development methodologies.[27]

- Consider a rational unified process (RUP) development standard when organizations need to follow an iterative software development process. This is the case when requirements are unclear at the beginning and through iterations the solution is to be created.

- Consider a waterfall approach if requirements can be well defined and managed, if the organization has strong experience in waterfall and has built up its own templates and processes and tools to successfully develop applications.

For a multi-dimensional AO deal requiring a range of application services and related delivery methods, all the above application services elements will be important to assess ESPs against.[28] And in an increasing offshoring market, the ESP's global delivery model is also very important to validate.[29]

3.5 Business Process Outsourcing Services

Business process outsourcing (BPO) is about continuous service delivery of certain business processes — some discrete and some end to end. The ISO20000 standard is couched in terms of service delivery whether it be infrastructure, application or business process outsourcing services. Similarly, CMMI and ITIL apply at the underlying layers of application and infrastructure services respectively.

For BPO services that are utilizing the users application platform or a new application platform from the provider, organizations should further validate the underlying enterprise architecture that the ESP deploys and how the business and information view affect the BPO services they provide. While less widely applied as most standards mentioned so far, BiSL is a standard that focuses on the business process and business demand and therefore would present a way to continuously align the BPO services with changing demand.

As BPO is less developed than ITO or AO services, we see that most ESPs are developing internal delivery methodologies based on industry-based key performance indicators. We are also seeing some ESPs adopt eSCM-SP as a basis for reviewing how they might deliver services more consistently and whether they have the key components required in a comprehensive service delivery architecture.

3.6 IT Consulting Services

In this mature service category, it's the strength of the provider's consulting methodologies which are particularly important in evaluating these service providers' capabilities, rather than applicability of specific standards and frameworks. Some providers of IT consulting services have patented their methodologies, others share their methods and frameworks with clients to solve a critical business issues or share methods in open innovation communities.

In evaluating their consulting methods, focus on the evolution of repeatable, consistent and reliable process-based delivery methodologies and whether the provider has a knowledge management system to capture their learning and to avoid repetition of problems that inevitably occur from time to time. Also, review their industry-specific capabilities that should always include in-depth knowledge of the industry independent and industry dependent regulations and common business best practices.

In addition, the experiences of lead consultants and repeatability and track record of their proposed delivery methods for consulting assignments are some key considerations. Also assess whether their methods include toolkits with "industry blueprints" for best practice processing models for your industry and business areas which are applicable to the assignment you wish to set for them.

Given that consulting engagements regularly result in or impact organizational change, their expertise in and methods of addressing communication and organizational change management programs should not be ignored.

The consulting firm's knowledge of industry standards and frameworks is still relevant when they are assisting your enterprise to implement certain business and IT initiatives. For example if they are assisting you with improving IT governance or IT service management, then their working knowledge of frameworks and standards like CoBit or ITIL and ISO20000 respectively are important in evaluating their capability to deliver the outcomes you require. Alternatively, if they are assisting you with improving your business processes, knowledge of Six Sigma or Lean-based approaches is crucial.

Consulting assignments are also typically discrete project-based services. So, elements such as Prince2/Pmbok are important at the project delivery level as secondary evaluation and selection criteria for consulting service providers.

3.7 Cloud Services

Cloud services are an immense and evolving area and organizations need to leverage all the above frameworks/standards dependent on the services at hand. For example each "stack/layer" within the cloud service might be "powered" by different ESPs, so at each level you should check the maturity and methodology of ESPs supporting the cloud ESP to deliver the pre-requisite services. Both the individual and aggregate capabilities of the ESPs involved in the infrastructure, applications and business process layers of cloud services need to be assessed and the old sporting adage of "the [service delivery] chain is only as strong as the weakest link" applies.

Client organizations should therefore:

1. Get enough visibility on cloud providers' value chain to be able to judge its quality.

2. Be skeptical of vendor claims, and demand written or in-person evidence about risk mitigation and industry standards adopted.

3. Do not accept the claimed existence of a certification or other third-party assessment as being adequate proof of security and continuity fitness for purpose.

Overall cloud services must be approached with a clear sourcing and risk strategy in mind.[30]

4.0 Summary

When evaluating ESPs for outsourcing application, infrastructure, business process or cloud services, their ability to deliver predictable, reliable, compliant yet flexible services is critical. Review the maturity and track record of ESP delivery methodologies against the identified industry frameworks and standards during market scans to eliminate less suitable, higher risk ESPs.

An ESP that has a repeatable set of processes for delivering services consistently, based on international standards, is able to more effectively:

- Deliver service outcomes required by clients.

- Standardize their service delivery and enable process improvement.

- Improve communication between enterprises and their ESPs.

- Execute service delivery efficiently through repeatable processes generating consistent outcomes.

Thus in terms of evaluation best practices we find that industry track record, service maturity and cultural compatibility are common criteria in many vendor evaluation models used by clients when going through the process of selecting respective ESPs.[31]

4.1 Tactical Guidelines

When evaluating ESPs delivery methodologies and capabilities consider:

- ITIL, ISO20000 and e-SCM-SP for infrastructure management, application management and BPO services.

- CMMI for application development services in conjunction with strong quality and project management frameworks.

- Prince2 and Pmbok for project and program management services.

- Six Sigma or Lean for quality management and improvement programs.

- Repeatability of their custom-made methodologies, toolkits and industry templates for SI/ package-based projects.

- The experience of lead consultants and repeatability and track record of their delivery approaches for consulting assignments.

- The experience of the ESPs supporting the network, infrastructure, applications and process layers when evaluating cloud ESPs.

Recommended Reading

"Understand How Methodologies Evolve Into Standards to Achieve Service Excellence"

"User Survey Analysis: Influence of ITIL and ISO 20000 on Selection of Providers for Data Center Outsourcing and Hosting"

"How to Ensure Infrastructure Providers Can Deliver Service Excellence"

"Q&A Regarding Best Practices for Selecting Service Providers"

"Quality Assurance Practices Will Drive the Reuse of Services in SOA Environments"

"A Reference Architecture for Collaborative Enterprise Business Process Improvement Technologies"

"The CMMI for Development Value Proposition for the PMO"

"Evaluating, Selecting and Managing Cloud Service Providers: Leverage Key Outsourcing Lessons Learned"

"A Lean IT Glossary"

Evidence

[1] The observations and advice in this research are based on:

- Previous analysis of industry frameworks and standards.

- Interactions with clients, vendors and industry peers on lessons they learnt in a range of deals — on average about one every two weeks.

- Insights gained from case studies of such deals.

- Reviewing many client RFIs and RFPs to identify common service requirements.

- Regularly working with clients to help them identify and apply relevant best practices.

[2] The standards and frameworks covered by this research were also validated against a Gartner survey conducted 1Q09 and our analysis of the most widely accepted and applied international standards. In this Gartner survey of 810 respondents, we asked organizations how they rated the importance of 17 different elements in the evaluation and selection of outsourcing external service providers (ESPs). The survey used a rating scale of 1 to 7 where 7 is extremely important and 1 is not at all important. Respondents rated the 17 elements as followings:

- ISO9001

- ISO27001

- ISO17779

- ISO2000

- Comprehensive package delivery methodology

- Comprehensive custom application methodology

- SAS70

- CMMI

- Six Sigma

- ITIL V3

- CobIT

- Prince

- RUP

- PmBok

- Lean QM

- eSCM-CL

- eSCM-SP

They are listed in order of ranking with average user ranking scores of 5.65 down to 5.15 out of a maximum of 7, so all scored reasonably high in terms of user importance.

Part of the survey analysis was published under "User Survey Analysis: Influence of ITIL and ISO 20000 on Selection of Providers for Data Center Outsourcing and Hosting"

[3] "Hype Cycle for Regulations and Related Standards, 2010"

[4] http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=54538

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_Sigma

[6] http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=42103

[7] "IT GRCM Functions Defined"

[8] http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=50297

[9] http://www.isaca.org/

[10] http://www.itsqc.org/

[11] "Overview and Assessment of eSCM-CL Framework"

[12] http://www.opengroup.org/togaf/

13 "Ten Criteria for Selecting an Enterprise Architecture Framework"

14 http://www.coso.org/

15 "SOX Compliance Requires Special Attention When Outsourcing"

16 http://sas70.com/sas70_overview.html

17 "Hype Cycle for Regulations and Related Standards, 2010"

18 http://www.itil-officialsite.com/home/home.asp

19 http://www.iso.org/iso/search.htm?
qt=20000&searchSubmit=Search&sort=rel&type=simple&published=true

20 http://www.apmgroup.co.uk/PRINCE2/PRINCE2Home.asp

21 http://www.pmi.org/Resources/Pages/Library-of-PMI-Global-Standards-projects.aspx

22 "How to Ensure Infrastructure Providers Can Deliver Service Excellence"

23 http://www.aslbislfoundation.org/index.php?lang=en

24 http://www.sei.cmu.edu/CMMI/

25 "Research Roundup: ERP/Business Applications Support Best Practices"

26 "Best Practices to Improve Performance of Your Offshore Application Development Vendor"

27 "Hype Cycle for Application Development, 2009" and "Agile Development: Fact or Fiction"

28 "Toolkit Best Practice: Distributed Development Requires Collaboration Throughout the Project Life Cycle"

29 "Global Delivery Model Market Competitiveness Cube Provides Insights into IT Services Providers' Direction"

30 "Analyzing the Risk Dimensions of Cloud and SaaS Computing"

31 "How to Use a Vendor Evaluation Model to Standardize IT Services Provider Selections"

32 "Understand How Methodologies Evolve Into Standards to Achieve Service Excellence"

33 "Assess Your Offshore Readiness: Use Gartner's Offshore Sourcing Maturity Model"

34 "Maturity Model Overview: Application Organizations"

35 "Toolkit Best Practices: Program and Portfolio Management Maturity Model"

[36] "Toolkit: Sourcing Capability Self-Assessment Version 1.0"

[37] "Introducing the Gartner IT Infrastructure and Operations Maturity Model"

[38] "Evaluate F&A BPO With an Accounts Payable Maturity Model"

Note 1 Methodologies

Methodologies are repeatable methods and processes that reflect best practices. These consistent methods and processes enable service providers to deliver services to reduce the risk of delivery failures. Typically, providers develop methodologies over time and incorporate them into an internal knowledge management system, which practitioners and operational staff share with the client organization.

Frameworks

Frameworks are models of how things might best fit together — for example, the ITIL, Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI), eSCM, Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology (CobiT), and Statement on Auditing Standards No. 70 (SAS 70).

Standards

Standards are industry guidelines or rules that make these best-practice processes and models easier for a wide range of organizations to use and access — for example, ISO20000 and ISO9000. Gartner has published more details around methodologies, frameworks and standards.[32]

Note 2 Maturity Models

Gartner has published a range of notes on different maturity models from a client organization and ESP perspective.[33-38]

This is part of a set of related research. See the following for an overview:

- IT Challenges for Enterprises in China, 2012

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