

# Where to start with the ITIL practices

by **Stephen Mann** | July 30, 2024



7 min read

Practitioner Resources

Theory & Practice

ITIL

🔖 ❤️ 29 Likes

How an organization should begin applying ITIL® has changed considerably over the last two decades. However, by the end of this article, you will see that the processes adopted today are not significantly different to those of the past. Whether you are just starting your journey with ITIL or are adding to your existing practice capabilities, this article will help by using the history of ITIL adoption advice to show you how to best apply ITIL 4 today.

## How the original view of ITIL adoption has changed

In the 2000s, there were several ways organizations would start with ITIL adoption (based on consultancy or tool vendor advice), usually as part of an IT service management (ITSM) tool adoption project. This approach involved the implementation of one of three process pairs in the ITSM tool:

- incident management and problem management
- incident and change management
- change management and configuration management

Service request management was not usually included as a separate process and instead was assumed to be part of incident management.

## Modern ITIL adoption

https://www.peoplecert.org/Resources Pages Folder/where-to-start-with-the-iti-actices

1/7

7/7/25, 8:01 PM peoplecert.org/Resources Pages Folder/where-to-start-with-the-iti-actices  
Much has changed with the role and expectations of ITSM since then, though (and not just the various versions of ITIL, where best practice processes evolved to practice guidance). For example, increased corporate reliance on technology and the criticality of its availability. But the underlying 'adopt and adapt' ethos of ITIL has remained, meaning that some ITIL practices have been adopted more than others based on organizations' needs (or at least perceived needs and resource limitations).

In the table below are listed the most commonly adopted ITIL practices according to the 2022 Axelos ITSM Benchmarking Report:

Table 1: ITIL practice adoption level

Practice	Adoption level
Service desk	89%
Incident management	89%
Service request management	85%
Change enablement	84%
Problem management	80%
Knowledge management	79%
Asset management	78%
Relationship management	77%
Continual improvement	73%
Financial management	72%
Service catalogue/self-service	69%
Supplier management	69%
Service design	64%
Service configuration management	64%

(Source: Axelos, The Axelos ITSM Benchmarking Report 2022)

This survey data shows high adoption levels for three of the four pairing elements, with only service configuration management showing less than **80%** adoption. Of course, given ITIL's 'adopt and adapt' ethos, these levels reflect the adoption of any part of each practice and not necessarily all of the practice guidance. This perspective is reflected in the respondents' self-rating of their capabilities, with at least **60%** stating a need to improve for all the practices bar service desk and incident management.

## Where to start

In terms of what organizations should adopt first, the advisory perspective has changed considerably, shifting from process inputs to business outcomes. So, rather than suggesting that an organization starts with incident and problem management, it is more likely that a perspective that begins by asking: 'What are your key challenges?' will be taken (to better align new or

https://www.peoplecert.org/Resources Pages Folder/where-to-start-with-the-iti-actices

2/7

7/7/25, 8:01 PM peoplecert.org/Resources Pages Folder/where-to-start-with-the-iti-actices  
improved capabilities with business needs). In contrast with two decades ago, the exception is that continual improvement will likely be advised as an ITIL practice to adopt early on.

There is little freely available data on which ITIL practices are actually adopted first, and many ITSM tool vendors still often demo their tools using a traditional, but logical, approach on how to create:

- an incident ticket
- a problem ticket from an incident ticket
- a problem ticket from an incident ticket

Then they move into service configuration management and the configuration management database (CMDB), and potentially discover IT asset management, confirming a bias towards the practices that were popular as starting points in the 2000s.

## A data-based insight

The survey referenced below was designed to better understand the order in which ITIL practices are adopted. Despite the relatively small sample (64 responses), the findings are still interesting. Incident management, change enablement, and problem management are all rated highly in terms of initial adoption. Notably, there is little sign of continual improvement becoming an ITIL practice of early adoption.

Table 2: Adoption of ITIL practices

Practice	Percentage
Incident management	84%
Service request management	77%
Change enablement	50%
Problem management	38%
Service catalogue/self-service	38%
Knowledge management	33%
Asset management	31%
Service configuration management	28%
Continual improvement	22%
Service design	19%
Relationship management	16%
Supplier management	16%
Financial management	9%

(Source: ITSM.tools, The Practices Adopted in the First Phase of ITIL, 2022)

https://www.peoplecert.org/Resources Pages Folder/where-to-start-with-the-iti-actices

3/7

7/7/25, 8:01 PM peoplecert.org/Resources Pages Folder/where-to-start-with-the-iti-actices  
It should also be noted that as the responses are not timebound, the data could reflect periods where the prevailing advice around ITIL adoption and organizational priorities differed. So, in addition to the previously mentioned potential for varying levels of adoption, the data could represent recent ITIL adoptions, older ITIL adoptions, and ITIL re-adoptions that resulted from tool replacement projects (so it is not an organization's first ITIL adoption, but the introduction of a new tool brought a fresh start with ITIL).

## What this means for your organization's ITIL adoption plans

Incident management and change enablement continue to be two of the most commonly adopted 'first phase' ITIL practices. This likely aligns with the modern advice to introduce ITIL capabilities that help with key business pain points, with the ability to effectively resolve incidents and enable changes swiftly and with minimum risk and disruption vital to most organizations.

So, if you want to introduce just three ITIL practices at the start of your ITIL-enabled ITSM improvement journey, you might find that even with the latest guidance, the most likely trinity of ITIL practices to adopt will be continual improvement along with the traditional pairing of incident management and change enablement.

But ultimately, your organization needs to adopt the ITIL practices that help to address the issues and opportunities that matter most.