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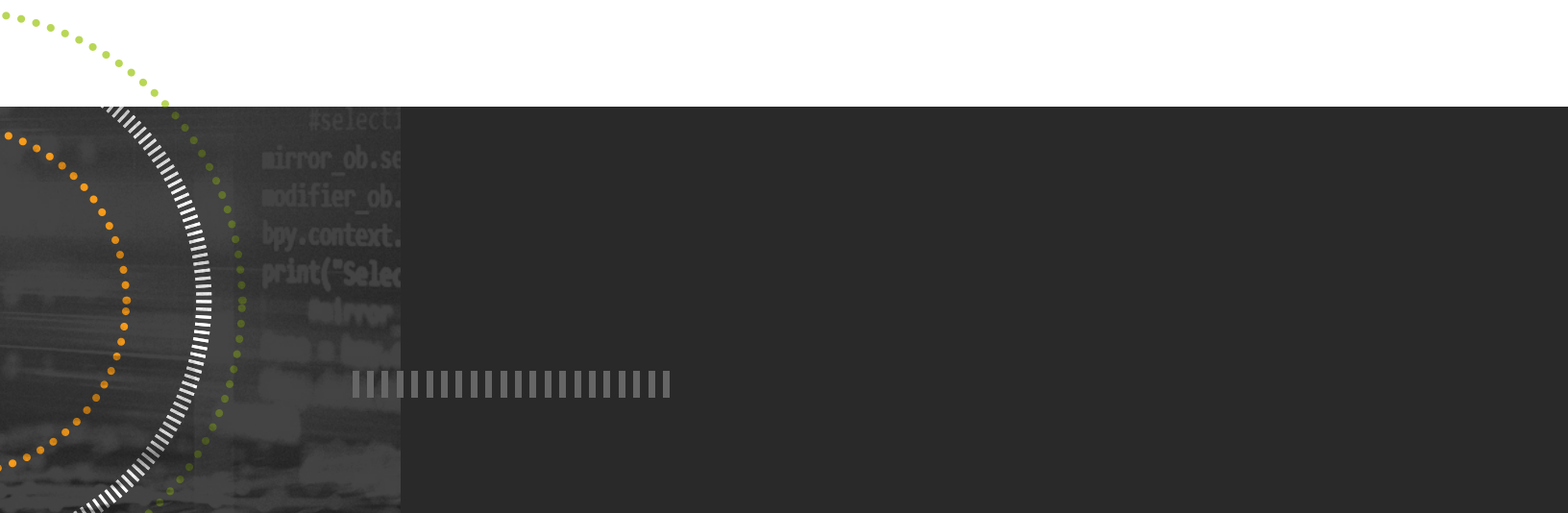
The Future of IT Service Management with AI

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As businesses move beyond rigid rules and strictly linear processes in IT service management, there's a world of opportunity for artificial intelligence-powered automation in both proactive and reactive service delivery. We discuss what that smart tech-driven world can look like and how you can get there.

WHERE WE ARE

IT service management (ITSM) is at a crossroads. From resource stagnation/ shortages to the new "distributed enterprise," supporting users efficiently is more challenging than ever. The bright side is that this situation presents a unique opportunity to lean even more into smart technologies like automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning—but it's not always easy. From *Gartner Identifies the Top Strategic Technology Trends for 2022:* "IT leaders struggle to integrate AI within applications, wasting time and money on AI projects that are never put in production, or struggling to retain value from AI solutions once released. AI engineering is an integrated approach for operationalizing AI models."

That's understandable. At the cusp of any technological evolution, there are elements of frustration, hesitation, and, quite frankly, fear. Think of how much pushback we saw a decade ago when streaming and cloud computing began to gain a foothold. Today, people hear "AI" and "automation" when it comes to ITSM and immediately picture HAL 9000.

We want our lives to be easier. We want to be able to increase efficiency and focus on core tasks. But at the same time, we don't want to diminish the human element of service. Balance is just as much a part of any solution as technology is. To succeed, you must be nimble, not fearful facing forward and ready to act on the inevitable change. And for automation, that means smart strategy, thoughtful planning, measured implementation, and scalability. A little scary, but exciting.
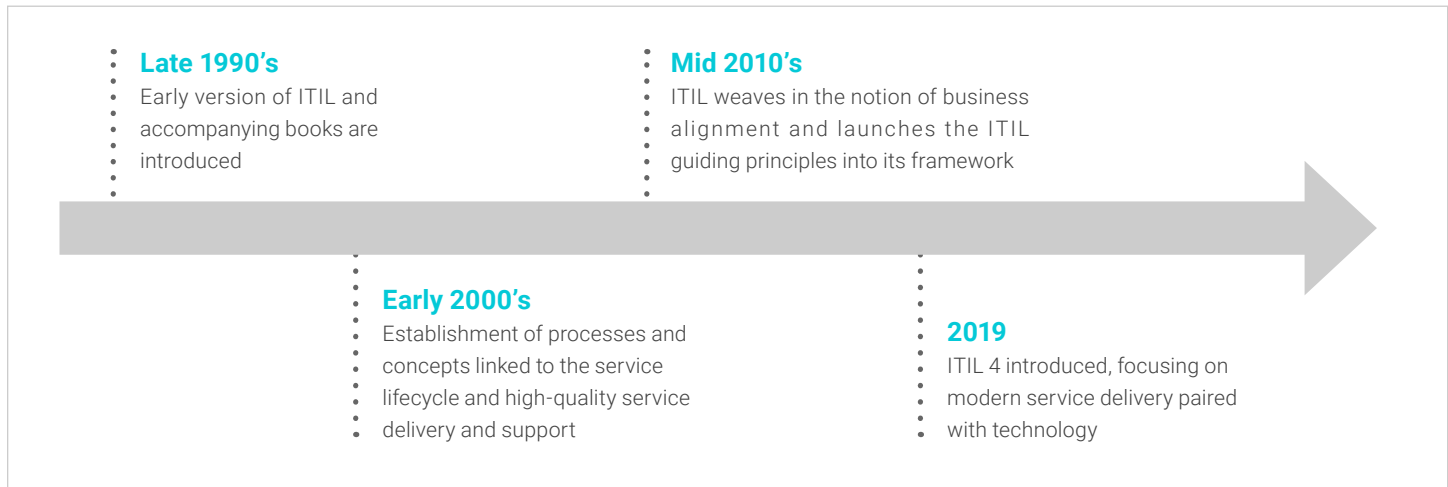
> So, when service management is no longer bound by linear processes, where can we go?

> " *I know I've made some very poor decisions recently, but I can give you my complete assurance that my work will be back to normal.* "
>
> — *HAL 9000*, 2001: A Space Odyssey

The Evolution of ITIL

The ITIL framework offers guidance for designing and delivering services, underlined by how they can align to the holistic values of their organization.

Late 1990's
Early version of ITIL and accompanying books are introduced

Mid 2010's
ITIL weaves in the notion of business alignment and launches the ITIL guiding principles into its framework

Early 2000's
Establishment of processes and concepts linked to the service lifecycle and high-quality service delivery and support

2019
ITIL 4 introduced, focusing on modern service delivery paired with technology

WHERE WE WANT TO GO

Once we move beyond strictly linear processes, we can more easily adapt to things like culture and the human element in general. Instead of seeing rigid rules, there's an opportunity to leverage ITIL practices as guidelines, molding those best practices to the way you and your team work. We've already seen it throughout 2020 and 2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic forced companies to be flexible with processes to accommodate a rapid remote alignment and support geographically dispersed workforces. Gone were physical training and approvals to bring on a new hire. We witnessed IT, human resources, facilities teams, and more swiftly embrace automated processes to meet evolving health requirements to ensure users' ongoing productivity, safety, and success. And it worked.

With that "proof of concept" in our pocket, there's a pressing desire to maintain nimbleness as teams maintain hybrid or work-from-anywhere (WFA) operations and do so efficiently. It's clear the benefits automation and AI can help not just for today, but for the future.

So, rather than trying to fit a round peg in a square hole, open yourself up to the idea of shaving the peg down to fit. We can have repeatable—but agile—processes. We don't always have to be in-person to be efficient. It's time to shake things up in service management, and smart technologies are the way to go.

> **AI isn't scary. It's another tool to boost productivity and heighten efficiency.**

Speaking of opening yourself up to new ideas, let's address the elephant in the room. AI-powered automation isn't here to steal jobs, it's here to free up workers by eliminating human intervention, enabling them to focus on tasks that require human interaction. Beyond streamlining operations, this degree of automation impacts the user experience, fueling more positive service engagements. We already see it today, enhancing our overall user experience: on our personal computers and mobile devices with automated backups; in the latest facial recognition and autonomous driving tech; on search engines providing recommendations; as well as automatic app and operating system updates. When molding your service strategy to implement automation and smart technologies in your ITSM platform, consider where these tools can help:

- Optimize service management operations to automate data collection or suggest knowledge content to drive efficiencies and self-service

- Shorten response time with AI-recommendations linked to potential workarounds or resolutions, based on historical trends and insights

- Eliminate silos with streamlined processes and routing rules, connecting cross-functional internal service providers, building the case for enterprise service management

When implementing any new technology or process, ensure these changes will work for your business and your people, but won't become a disruption. Review where you are and ultimately where you want automation to take your service delivery by enhancing what works and improving what doesn't.

HOW WE GET THERE

1. The service value chain
2. Management practices
3. Governance
4. Guiding principles
5. Continual improvement (no longer continual service improvement)

Guiding
Principles

Opportunity/
Demand

Service
Value
Chain

Value

Continual
Improvement
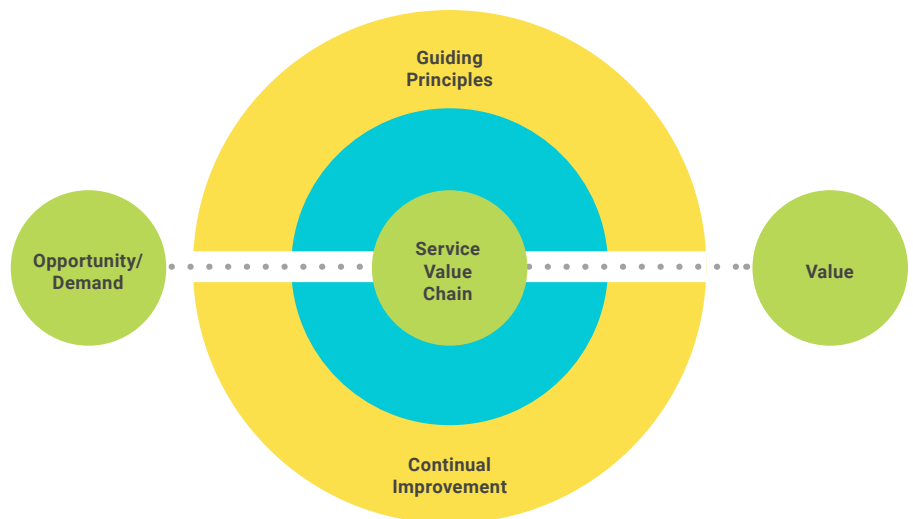
Once you recognize the inherent benefits of these smart technologies, the next step is precisely planning how you want them to work for your business goals. As ITIL 4 has shifted from rigid service-related processes to holistic practices centered on co-creating value, there's the opportunity to map your internal service strategy, design to align with your organization's culture, and interpret their best practices as your teams see fit. This way you're not automating processes just because you can—you're doing it to optimize efficiency as well as the human element.

PLAN TO PLAN.

Start with strategy. Teams should look to the ITIL guiding principles to:

- **Focus on Value** – How can implementing smart technologies like AI maximize the value and perceived benefits your service desk brings the organization?

- **Think and Work Holistically** – To drive optimal value and to maximize human and technical resources to deliver services/support, step back and look at the bigger picture (objectives of the organization at large) so your improvements/automation are implemented to complement each other.

- **Keep it Simple and Practical** – To ensure the introduction of automation and/or removal of legacy manual processes is executed in a way that truly provides value, focus on improving the simplest things. Remember, AI + automation should be in play to drive positive/impactful results, not create more work.

- **Optimize then Automate** – Before even thinking about automating, simplify your internal business processes and service practices. This will give you a firm, effective foundation and put you in a better position to achieve your desired outcome.

> Keep in mind: You don't want a fast caterpillar;
> you want a butterfly.

LOOK UNDER THE HOOD.

With a strategy in mind, you can now conduct a thorough review of your current structure and processes. A simple, effective approach is a SWOT analysis: Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, and Threats. The graphic below provides some examples of the kinds of questions to consider during the analysis.

Internal

Positive

Strengths

- What do we do well?
- What's working for us?
- What are our most efficient processes?
- What are the best elements of our service delivery?

Weaknesses

- What are our biggest pain points?
- Where do we lack support or resources?
- Where is service delivery not working?
- What are the most frequent complaints/issues?

Opportunities

- Where do we want to grow?
- Where can we improve?
- What does our organization value/ what's on their agenda to achieve?
- What tools do we already have in our tech portfolio?
- What business goals or operations can we support or streamline with automation?

Threats

- What could kill our momentum?
- Could downtime hurt operations?
- Will there be cultural pushback? ("the way-we've-always-done it-itis?")
- Do we have the budget to do this the right way?

Negative

External

WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD.

After balancing your current structure with your strategic goals, you'll be in a strong position to plan out the implementation of your new automation. However, there are still some considerations and potential pitfalls to be aware of. First, be **careful not to overcomplicate** matters by "automating just to automate." Carefully look at where you can gain the most efficiency by removing redundancies in practices or elements of manual input. When introducing any update, be sure to document all changes should you ever need to revert. And always think beyond today—be agile and open to adapting processes as your organization (or service demand) grows. More on that in a moment.

Next is the ever-delicate dance of getting **stakeholder buy-in**. Plan ahead with simple and direct business cases for investing in smart technologies. Articulating "what's in it for the bottom line" can help advocate the perceived benefits and how automation can be implemented. Stakeholders can't argue with saved time and human resources, more efficient fulfillment, or more proactive service motions.

Then, think about how to **make the transition as smooth as possible** (which will also lessen any pushback). Introduce automation and other integrated technologies like AI, so they mesh with your organizational culture and values, and ultimately help drive the user experience. When designing service management practices with automation, recognize the importance of organizational "ABCs" (Attitudes, Behavior, Culture) and how these changes could affect users. It's beneficial to establish an open channel of communication and foster a transparent dialogue across teams. This can be used to provide ample training, facilitate awareness on updates, and collect ongoing insight. This can also be applied to how you continue to improve post-introduction to follow another ITIL guiding principle: "progress iteratively with feedback."

During each phase, periodically go back and review your SWOT to see what has shifted, improved, or needs additional work. Evaluate if you've met your previously defined criteria for success or your users' expectations. Then continue to build off that review to find ways to introduce or refine processes you've automated to make a holistic impact on the organization.

THINK ABOUT WHAT'S NEXT

With automated improvements to service delivery, consider how automation and AI can further your visions of enterprise service management to support beyond IT initiatives and unify departments across the organization. But how?

- Automating legacy internal processes with cross-functional overlap (such as an employee department move or creating a security badge and access for a new hire) can seed the value of multiple service providers embracing service management practices and a shared ITSM platform.

- Other groups and departments may recognize benefits from smart technology-driven service delivery:

  - Seeing and experiencing rapid responses paired with efficient service fulfillment

  - Centralized visibility in the existing service desk footprint

  - Enhanced channels for communication

  - More time for technicians to focus on core tasks or larger projects

  As a result, these other departments may be enticed to leverage and share the same ITSM solution, creating a comprehensive support resource within the enterprise.

- Fueling self-service initiatives (with enhanced knowledge documentation and using tools that leverage AI to make suggestions to help drive users to the appropriate content) and drive case deflection.

 You'll ultimately be able to use your successful implementation to drive support for future automation/AI with organizational change, through:

- Ongoing education
- Knowledge management
- Furthering visions for digital transformation
- Executing on the user experience you wish to cultivate
- The perceived benefits of automation in action and drive to continually improve

At the end of the day, you can expand your existing ITSM investment and potentially improve efficiency, ROI, and user satisfaction while laying the groundwork to move your entire organization forward with automation. (We'd still recommend against naming your system "HAL.")
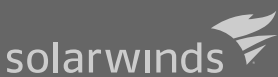
NEXT STEPS/SUMMARY:

The Journey to Embracing Smart Technologies for Tomorrow

KNOW WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU **SWOT YOURSELF** **GET BUY IN** **PLAN BEFORE YOU IMPLEMENT** **BUILD FOR THE FUTURE**

ABOUT SOLARWINDS

SolarWinds (NYSE:SWI) is a leading provider of simple, powerful, and secure IT management software. Our solutions give organizations worldwide—regardless of type, size, or complexity—the power to accelerate business transformation in today's hybrid IT environments. We continuously engage with technology professionals— IT service and operations professionals, DevOps and SecOps professionals, and database administrators (DBAs)—to understand the challenges they face in maintaining high-performing and highly available IT infrastructures, applications, and environments. The insights we gain from them, in places like our THWACK® community, allow us to address customers' needs now and in the future. Our focus on the user and commitment to excellence in end-to-end hybrid IT management have established SolarWinds as a worldwide leader in solutions for observability, IT service management, application performance, and database management. Learn more today at www.solarwinds.com.