IBM’s IT Service Management Vision

Abstract

IBM's IT Service Management vision is highly focused on IT processes, and the integration of process, technology, people, and information. It has breadth and depth into automated service management and ITIL, and shows continued commitment to On Demand business. Just how much of the IT world is ready for this wide-ranging concept is yet to be determined.

IBM’s IT Service Management Announcement

On May 16, 2005 IBM announced its new IT Service Management vision. The announcement was focused on increased automation, process enablement, and increased IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) alignment and support. While based on current IBM Tivoli solutions, it also combines solutions from other IBM product lines to create extensive integration and automated capabilities. There are several new or enhanced components announced in this roll-out: the Web-based IBM Tivoli Unified Process to help customers navigate through IT processes and map those to IBM products, a Change and Configuration Management Database (CCMDB), and 14 products with new task automation capabilities. The announcement also highlights IBM Global Services’ (IGS) ability to provide supplemental assistance for IT organizations that need help putting it all together. There are also new capabilities to increase the integration of its broad solution set, and to facilitate integration with third party tools and data.

Helping IT Reduce Costs and Improve Services

Reduced costs, better ROI, “doing more with less”—all of these are the call of the IT organization of today. The popularity and uptake of IT process models grew exponentially after the economic downturn. Organizations (incorrectly) assumed that since it is “only” a process, implementing ITIL or another best practice should require minimal outlay. While the benefits of process improvement are real, many companies have been dismayed at the time and cost required to convert their processes to a standard model, or how to make software products “do” these well-defined paper processes.

IT is also struggling under the burden of technology “silos” such as systems management, network management, storage management, security management, applications management, and Web management. This creates a lack of integration of data and expertise, overlapping and underutilized tool sets, a lack of process that spans across the silos, and overall inefficiency. Even worse are the outages and problems that are caused by IT because of a lack of change management oversight. The “web” analogy used by the Internet can be applied inside the IT organization as well: shaking one part of the infrastructure will cause reverberations in all parts.

The IT manager is looking for a better way and IBM is stepping up to provide practical assistance in developing IT processes.

Key Ramifications of IBM’s Announcement

IBM’s IT Service Management brings three main thoughts to the table: increased access to and standardization of IT processes, a configuration management database (CMDB) at the heart of organization, and additional automation capabilities.

The IBM Tivoli Unified Process

While ITIL provides good high-level guidance, there are frequent complaints about the lack of specificity in ITIL, with on-going questions about how to implement ITIL processes using existing software products. The IBM Tivoli Unified Process, based on technology leveraged from IBM's Rational brand, is IBM’s answer to those questions. This Web-based resource will immediately help all IBM's customers get greater functionality from their infrastructure purchases, identify how they may get started with ITIL in their current infrastructure, and identify what solutions may be necessary to take a next step toward ITIL. It serves as a high-level reference for navigating through IT processes in several ways. One can start with a list of IBM Tivoli solutions to see how they can be used to fulfill the ITIL process definitions; or start with an ITIL process and see which solutions map to that process. IT roles can also serve as a starting point for investigating how to accomplish work. In addition to containing ITIL process diagrams with drill-down to detailed workflow steps and work products such as service level agreement forms, there are also “tool mentors” that show screenshots of the tools with appropriate settings. The IBM Tivoli Unified Process is already available on IBM's website.

IBM’s IT Process Managers

IBM has leveraged IGS’s extensive experience with IT processes and ITIL best practices to create IT Process Managers. These are software solutions with executable workflows that define,
monitor, report, and automate IT processes. Processes are modeled using embedded WebSphere Business Integration (WBI) capabilities, with portlets for human workflow and integration adapters to existing IBM products to execute IT actions, such as distributing software releases or changing storage configurations. To use IBM’s words, these Process Managers are what “make ITIL actionable.”

In a phased implementation, Change and Configuration Management will be the first supported processes, released in late 2005 (with the foundational CCMDB discussed below). Mid-2006 will bring Release Management (with IBM Tivoli Provisioning Manager 3.1), Availability Management (with IBM Tivoli OMEGAMON XE for WebSphere Business Integration V1.1.0), and Information Lifecycle Management (with TotalStorage Productivity Center and TotalStorage SAN Volume Controller). In a move to stay flexible and widely applicable to all industry segments, IBM will be moving toward support of the Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology (COBIT) and Six Sigma best practice models as well.

IBM Change and Configuration Management Database

A CMDB serves as a central repository for configuration information across the enterprise. Since one of the largest contributors to downtime is errors and complications when IT changes the configuration of elements, the CMDB is core to the effort to get a better handle on configuration and change management, in addition to supplying other management applications that require configuration information.

The IBM Change and Configuration Management Database (CCMDB) will be in limited release in Q3 2005. It brings the instant benefit of the configuration database for identifying and tracking changes—but goes far beyond the database concept. The IBM CCMDB truly becomes the heart of automated ITIL processes by including a workflow engine and WBI modeler, which serves as the foundation to run the IBM IT Process Managers. In a smart move, IBM has pre-packaged the Change Management and Configuration Management Process Managers with the CCMDB to facilitate better use of the CCMDB. In addition to the Service Delivery managers mentioned above, the stage is also set for further implementation and integration of other ITIL Service Support processes that rely on the CCMDB: Service Desk, Incident Management, and Problem Management.

Automation, Integration, and IGS Services

In terms of increasing automation, there are several approaches mentioned in each of the 14 improved solutions: automated security and patch updates, predefined and automated workflow steps, automated installs, and providing expert advice based on best practices. IBM’s Open Process Automation Library (OPAL), a partner ecosystem for sharing and incorporating workflows into the IBM Tivoli Intelligent Orchestrator product, is being extended to IT Service Management. Partners for the extension include Cisco, Citrix, Peregrine, and Siebel Systems.

And finally, IBM announced a no-cost, limited time offer for customers: an IT Service Management Assessment. This will identify IT challenges and areas where process improvements need to be focused in order to align a company’s technology capabilities. This can help IT decide where to start and how to best utilize IBM’s vast storehouse of solutions, processes, mentors, and professional services.

EMA’s Perspective

IBM continues to push the envelope in its vision of the On Demand operating environment. The pillars of support in this latest announcement of IBM’s IT Service Management vision are increased automation and best-practices process development. The On Demand initiative, first announced in Fall 2002, originally focused on integration, grid computing, and business alignment. While it is not clear that IBM can declare victory on those issues and move on, it is again forging ahead of the field with this new announcement.

IBM’s IT Service Management addresses the concerns of many IT managers by turning the nebulous concept of “service management” into concrete guidelines and executable processes via the IBM Tivoli Unified Process, tool mentors, and IT Process Managers. IBM has also re-invigorated its Tivoli Business Service Manager product with better integration to Tivoli Service Level Manager, workload management, and the CCMDB. May’s announcement also furthers the earlier goals of On Demand computing with tighter integration between its broad set of solutions, via its Services Oriented Architecture (SOA) bus for external integration, and the Open Process Automation Library (OPAL).

The question continues to be whether the majority of IT shops are really ready to absorb IBM’s broad and high-reaching vision. For many IT shops, IBM’s vision will be an unreachable goal. However, the solutions in this announcement provide practical help for companies who are looking to solve a specific pain point or to move toward the broader vision of IT Service Management. IBM is increasing the focus on automation, IT process development, best practice implementation, and the CCMDB. For the larger organization, this is the right direction to help IT deliver higher service levels at reduced cost.