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Using Institutionalism as a Lens to Examine ITIL Adoption and Diffusion

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Abstract

This study uses institutional theory as a lens to examine the increasing global diffusion of the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) and the motivation of individual organisations to adopt the framework. The history of ITIL is provided to illustrate how the framework has travelled through time and space. The register of organisations certified to the international standard for IT service management is analysed. Case studies reveal factors influencing the decision by managers to adopt ITIL and provide evidence to illustrate that coercive, normative and mimetic pressures have influenced the isomorphic adoption and diffusion of ITIL.

Keywords

Institutional theory, IT service management, IT infrastructure library (ITIL), case study, ISO/IEC 20000.

INTRODUCTION

IT Service management standards such as the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) are of increasing importance to organisations around the globe. Although the actual number of organizations adopting ITIL is not known, there are many indicators of the growing awareness and adoption. For example, there are now 53 national chapters of the IT Service Management Forum (itSMF) with in excess of 100,000 members worldwide (itSMFI); itSMF conferences report increasing attendances each year; and the demand for ITIL-qualified staff is increasing, accompanied by an increase in the number of ITIL Foundation certificates granted to individuals. Over 400 organisations in at least 40 countries have become certified to the international standard which is based on ITIL (itSMF, 2009).

Institutionalism is defined by Jepperson as “a theoretical strategy that features institutional theories and seeks to develop and apply them” (1991, p. 152). According to Meyer and Rowan, institutionalism examines how “social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action” (1977, p. 350). Institutionalism can include both macro perspectives as well as micro dimensions. In this multi-level study, the macro dimension relates to the evolution of ITIL and its diffusion throughout the global IT industry. The authors propose that ITIL processes have become institutionalised as evidenced by the rapid adoption within organisations’ IT departments and also by external IT service providers. The micro dimension will focus on the adoption behaviour/decision of individual organisations.

As well as providing an analysis of practical value to researchers and practitioners in the ITSM area, this study aims to extend our theoretical understanding of institutionalism at the organisational and sectoral levels. The next section introduces institutional theory, followed by a summary of ITIL adoption studies. After the methodology is described, the Field level analysis is presented including a report on the evolution of ITIL. Recent case studies and survey data are then analysed to investigate ITIL adoption behaviour at the micro level within individual organisations. The discussion reports on the findings followed by the conclusion which highlights limitations and suggests avenues for further research.

INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Institutional theory has been previously applied to study various issues in the context of IS research. At ACIS last year, Rowlands (2008) reported how a systems development methodology operated as an institutional carrier in the process of systems development. King et al. (1994) considered the role of institutions such as government agencies in the development of IT innovations. Currie (2004) used institutional theory as a lens to examine the adoption of application service providers. With Guah, she also used it to study a national IT healthcare programme (Currie & Guah, 2007). The behaviour of CIOs in relation to IT governance was explored by Magnusson and Oskarrson (2008). Hu and Quan (2006) applied institutional theory to determine that IT budgeting processes have been at least partially institutionalized. Orlikowski and Barley (2001) also acknowledged the contribution of institutional theory to IT literature.

Although the work of Meyer and Rowan (1977) was published 30 years ago, it is still relevant to the application of institutional theory today. Meyer and Rowan explain that ‘many of the positions, policies, programs, and procedures of modern organisations are enforced by public opinion, by the views of important constituents, by

knowledge through the educational system, social prestige, laws, and definitions of negligence and prudence' (1977, p. 343). As a result, these products, services, techniques, policies, and programs become institutionalised, and then gain even greater acceptance. In time, they function as "powerful myths and many organisations adopt them ceremonially" (1977, p. 340).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) observed the 'startling homogeneity of organisational forms and practices' and contend that this results in *isomorphism*. This paper proposes that the widespread adoption of ITIL by service providers has resulted in homogeneity of ITSM processes. As a result, internal IT departments and external IT Service Providers can be viewed as isomorphic in terms of their processes, vocabulary, and position descriptions.

Meyer and Rowan acknowledge that organisations may realise some benefits from institutional isomorphism. By adopting the *flavour of the month*, an organisation "demonstrates that it is acting on collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner" (1977, p. 349). As a result, the organisation is protected from having its conduct questioned, reminiscent of the adage of the 1970s: *you can't get fired for buying IBM*. Furthermore, such practices can promote the success and survival of organisations by reducing turbulence and maintaining stability (Zucker, 1987).

However, Meyer and Rowan warn that conformity to institutionalised rules often conflicts sharply with efficiency criteria because elements are adopted which are legitimated externally, rather than in terms of specific efficiency gains, and the criteria used to define the value of such elements are also legitimated externally (1977). This concept of questioning the rationality of decision makers challenged the existing organisational theories at the time that managers behaved as rational actors when evaluating proposals (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) use the term *organizational field* to identify those organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life. The organisational field includes key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies and other organisations that produce a similar product or service; in other words, 'the totality of relevant actors' (1983, p. 148). In tracing the evolution of ITIL, this study identifies the role played by various stakeholders who constitute the organisational field.

A group of researchers in Sweden/Finland coined the term *neo-institutionalism* and their work is sometimes referred to as Scandinavian Institutional theory. This area of research offers insights into concepts of isomorphism through ritual following of *managerial fashion* and refers to the travel of ideas through time and space (Magnusson & Oskarsson, 2008).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) developed two sets of predictors of isomorphic change; one set relates to organisational-level predictors and the other to field-level predictors. The organisational-level predictors refer to the adoption of an innovation, whereas the field-level predictors focus on dissemination across the industry sector. The hypotheses proposed by DiMaggio and Powell for each set of predictors are discussed in the analysis section. Furthermore, DiMaggio and Powell recognised that the organisational field exerts three kinds of isomorphic pressure: coercive, normative, and mimetic. Case studies are used to evaluate if these pressures are evident in ITIL adoption of 15 organisations studied.

ITIL ADOPTION STUDIES

To date there has been limited academic research undertaken into ITIL implementation. In South Africa, Potgieter, Botha and Lew (2005) conducted a case study with a government organisation and concluded that both customer satisfaction and operational performance improve as the activities in the ITIL framework increase. After analysing ITIL implementation in six German firms, Hochstein, Tamm and Brenner (2005) found the benefits from ITIL alignment are improved client/service orientation and the quality of IT services; greater efficiency due to standardization, optimizing of processes and process automation; and transparency and comparability through process documentation and process monitoring. Cater-Steel, Tan and Toleman (2006) replicated Hochstein's research with 12 organisations in Australia, United Kingdom and New Zealand, and found the benefits realised by ITIL included improved focus on IT service management, more predictable infrastructure, improved consultation with IT groups within the organisation, smoother negotiation of service level agreements and seamless end-to-end service. Cater-Steel, Tan and Toleman (2006) reported on the phenomenon of organisations adopting ITIL concurrently with other frameworks such as CobiT, CMMI and ISO 9000. Cater-Steel and McBride (2007) used actor network theory to examine the successful adoption of ITIL by a large UK financial institution; while Tan, Cater-Steel and Toleman (2007) considered factors associated with successful ITIL adoption in a large Australian-based public sector organisation.

There are many indicators of the growing awareness of ITIL worldwide (Cater-Steel & Tan, 2005a; Conger, Winniford, & Erickson-Harris, 2008; Hochstein, Tamm et al., 2005). In the U.S., Forrester Research reports a growing number of client inquiries about ITIL adoption. From July 2007 to July 2008 Forrester's IT infrastructure and operations team fielded nearly 30 percent more ITIL inquiries than during the same time

period the previous year (Hubbert & O'Donnell, 2008). And, in a recent global study, Axios Systems (2008) reported that 64 percent of IT professionals believe following ITIL is key to improving IT reputation. The study also revealed that 87 percent of the organisations followed ITIL guidelines with one in three organisations intending to adopt ITIL within a year, and another 36 percent considering its adoption. Axios Systems also report that although many organisations worldwide are successfully taking up ITSM, not all are experiencing positive outcomes and many of them are confused about how to implement ITIL successfully. This is consistent with findings reported by Cater-Steel and Tan (2005a) that only 56 percent of 108 Australian companies surveyed in 2005 felt that ITIL implementations had met or exceeded their expectations. Academic research related to the adoption of these frameworks is scarce despite obvious challenges to their adoption and implementation and to date ITSM scientific research in general has focused primarily on definitions and reporting descriptive statistics (Winniford, Conger, & Erickson-Harris, 2009). As highlighted by Hochstein, Zarnekow and Brenner (2005a), research is needed to understand why and how organisations are adopting ITIL and identify the factors that influence successful ITIL transformation projects worldwide.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate ITIL adoption at the field level, the register of organisations certified to the international standard for IT service management ISO/IEC 20000 (itSMF, 2009) was analysed. ISO/IEC 20000 is based on ITIL. This enabled certification adoption to be graphed and highlighted instances where single organisations achieved multiple certificates spread over several countries.

In researching the adoption of ITIL at the organisational level, the researchers draw on case studies conducted as part of an ongoing research project. The researchers used case studies for an empirical inquiry into the contemporary phenomenon (ITIL) within its natural context (Yin, 1994). The case study method provides the opportunity to ask penetrating questions and to capture the richness of organisational behaviour, but it is recognised that the conclusions drawn may be specific to the particular organisations studied and may not be generalisable (Gable, 1994). The authors have conducted in-depth interviews with 15 IT Service Managers. The organisations include private firms and government agencies mainly in Australia but including sites in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States of America.

The interview questions are based on those developed by Hochstein and his colleagues (2005; 2005a; 2005b) in their study of six large German firms. Permission was gained from Hochstein to use the interview questions. A copy of the interview protocol is available from the authors. Ethical clearance was obtained from the researchers' University ethics committee. The duration of each interview was approximately one hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, checked by the researchers and confirmed by the interviewees as a valid record of the interviews.

The case studies were analysed through content analysis of the transcripts to identify the presence of the predictors proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). In particular, factors which influenced the organisations in their decision to adopt ITIL were extracted. Following Creswell's (1998) advice, within-case analysis is followed by a cross-case analysis. The within-case analysis facilitates the detailed description of each case and any themes that emerge. The cross-case analysis looks for similar themes and patterns across all cases in the study. This method helps to build general explanations that can fit each case, as well as highlighting variations.

The interview questions relevant to the adoption decision are as follows:

- C.1 Who made the decision to introduce ITIL?
- C.2 What were the motives for the decision?
- C.3 What were the objectives for introducing ITIL?
- C.4 Was a business case provided? If so, who was the case presented to?
- C.5 Who initiated the project? Was there senior management support/commitment?

FIELD-LEVEL ANALYSIS

After providing a brief history of ITIL, the impact of both sets of predictors and the pressure they exert on the diffusion of ITIL through the field of IT is analysed and discussed.

The Genesis and Evolution of ITIL

The ITIL framework is provided in a set of comprehensive and coherent publications providing descriptive guidance on IT service management. The first version was developed by a British Government agency in the 1980s to promote efficient and cost-effective IT operations within government controlled computing centres. The

framework is currently administered by the UK's Office of Government Commerce (OGC). Various accounts of the history of ITIL have been posted to internet sites. Although there is some disagreement about some of the minor details, the milestones listed in Table 1, summarised from 'Doctor' (2007) and Viet (2008) are generally agreed to be accurate.

Table 1: Milestones in evolution of ITSM

1972	IBM starts research on quality service delivery called information Systems Management Architecture (ISMA).
1980	IBM publishes Volume I of the IBM Management series titled "A management System for the Information Business", first public edition of ISMA.
1986	UK Government agency Central Computer and Telecoms Agency (CCTA) authorizes a program to develop a common set of operational guidance with the objective of increasing efficiencies in Government IT.
1988	The Government Infrastructure Management Method (GITMM) is formalized and issued as guidelines for Government IT operations in the UK focused on Service Level Management. In the same year, the development team was expanded and work continued on Cost, Capacity, and Availability Management.
1989	GITMM title is considered to be inadequate. GITMM is renamed ITIL. First ITIL book published: Service Level Management, then Help Desk (incorporating the concepts of Incident Management), Contingency Planning, and Change Management.
1990	Problem Management, Configuration Management, and Cost Management for IT Services books published.
1991	Software Control & Distribution book published.
1992	Availability Management book published.
1997	Customer focused update to the Service Level Management book. IT Service Management Forum (itSMF) UK is chartered based on ITIMF.
2000	Service Support V2 book published. BS15000 ITIL aligned standard published.
2001	Service Delivery V2 book published. CCTA became a part of the Office of Government Commerce (OGC).
2002	Three books published: Application Management; Planning to Implement IT Service Management; and ICT Infrastructure Management. BS15000 service management standard is significantly revised.
2003	Software Asset Management book published.
2004	Business Perspective: The IS View on Delivering Services to the Business book published.
2005	International standard ISO/IEC 20000 published based on BS15000.
2006	ITIL Glossary V2 published.
2007	ITIL V3 five core books published.

As shown in Table 1, since its inception, ITIL has travelled through time and space, from IBM's ISMA in 1972 to the UK Government CCTA's GITMM, and ITIL versions 1, 2 and 3. The framework has evolved from internal 'best practice' guidelines in a UK government agency, to global adoption by international public and private sector organisations. As well, ITIL has migrated into the public domain: firstly a national standard (BS15000) and now an international standard (ISO/IEC 20000).

ISO/IEC 20000 Certification Adoption

It is not possible to know how many organisations have adopted ITIL, and analysis of ISO/IEC 20000 certificates is also limited as registration of certification is voluntary. A voluntary register is maintained by itSMF International and it provides the opportunity to consider the rate of adoption as well as the global spread. According to the itSMFI register, Japan with 67 organisations currently leads the world in terms of certification to ISO/IEC 20000, closely followed by the UK (54), India (47), China (47) and South Korea (39) (itSMF, 2009). High levels of adoption are recorded in Germany (27) and USA (20). There are a further 33 countries with less than 20 certified organisations. Adoption by organisations in South America (Brazil) and Africa (Botswana) provide evidence that diffusion of the standard has achieved global proportions.

To gain insight into the rate of certification, the cumulative number of certified organisations was analysed and graphed against the month and year certified and as shown in Figure 1. In a similar manner to many technology innovations, it would be expected that in the future the cumulative adoption would follow an S-curve when plotted over an extended length of time.

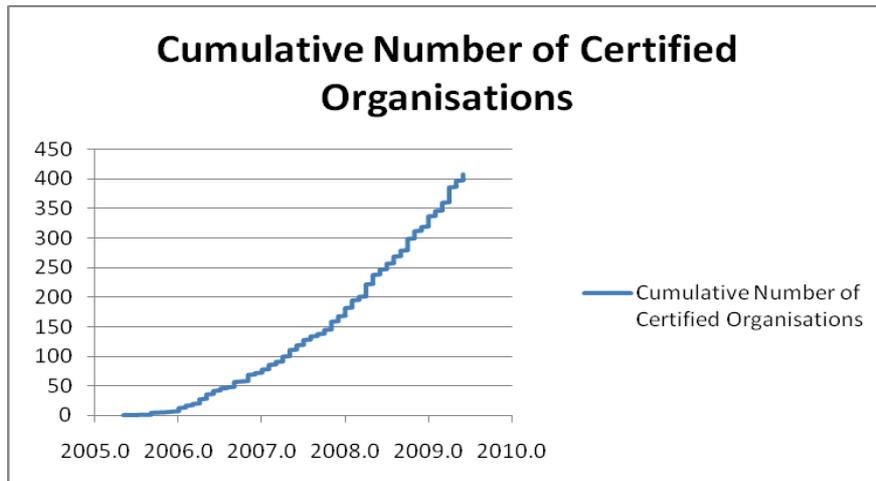


Figure 1: Cumulative adoption of ISO/IEC 20000 certification

Field-level Predictors

Each of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) six field-level predictors are now considered in relation to the evolution and diffusion of ITIL. Results from the analysis of the register of ISO/IEC 20000 certificates are used to inform the analysis.

F-1: The greater the extent to which an organizational field is dependent upon a single (or several similar) source of support for vital resources, the higher the level of isomorphism.

In the past and still today, many large IT departments are dependent on IBM and HP for corporate server facilities with Microsoft providing the lion's share of office and networking software. These three companies promote ITIL concepts and market software for ITSM.

The increasing trend to outsource part or all of IT services is relevant to this predictor. Well established IT service providers are strongly represented in the ISO/IEC 20000 certification register with multiple sites. For example, Fujitsu has 11 sites certified, BT Data Services 10, IBM 9, CSC 5, Accenture 4 and HP 3. With the increase in off-shoring IT services it is not surprising to see Indian IT Service providers such as TATA, Satyam and Infosys are also certified. The market dominance by these few service providers results in standardisation of ITSM processes across the ITSM field.

F-2: The greater the extent to which the organizations in a field transact with agencies of the state, the greater the extent of isomorphism in the field as a whole.

Although influenced by IBM's early guidelines, ITIL was developed by the UK government where it was originally named the Government Infrastructure Management Method (GITMM). It spread throughout the UK government computing community and would have influenced the suppliers and contractors who did business with any of the UK government agencies. Increasingly, organisations transact electronically with local, state and federal government agencies (e.g. e-tax, e-customs) resulting in standardisation in systems and processes (Otjacques et al. 2007).

F-3: The fewer the number of visible alternative organizational models in a field, the faster the rate of isomorphism in that field.

It appears that there were few visible alternative frameworks for managing IT services. Frameworks developed by Microsoft (MOF) and HP (HP-ITSM) are very similar and complementary to ITIL.

Over the same time period, other frameworks have also become popular in the IT organisational field, for example, CobiT, Prince 2, TQM, ISO 9000, CMMI, balanced scorecard. Rather than diminish the adoption of ITIL, these frameworks are considered complementary and some have been mapped to the ITIL processes. Association with other legitimate practices enhances the legitimacy of ITIL. Organisations consider these frameworks all contribute to governance.

F-4: *The greater the extent to which technologies are uncertain or goals are ambiguous within a field, the greater the rate of isomorphic change.*

Uncertainty exists in the IT field due to the rapid changes in technology. Further uncertainty is introduced through the practice of outsourcing, in particular off-shore outsourcing. Rather than focusing on the technology i.e. software/applications/hardware, organisations are now increasingly emphasizing that the IT budget be based on outcomes by the IT department i.e. support and delivery of IT services.

F-5: *The greater the extent of professionalization in a field, the greater the amount of institutional isomorphic change.*

Professionalization has occurred through the widespread availability of internationally accredited and recognised training programs and qualifications. Currently, there are six international organisations licensed to conduct certification examinations for individuals who wish to acquire ITIL or ISO/IEC 20000 qualifications (APM Group, 2007). The training courses are structured hierarchically to provide a career path for ITSM professionals from foundation to manager and finally master level.

The itSMF has also accelerated professionalism of ITSM through its conferences, seminars, and information on web sites. itSMF provides a professional network and successful adopters are showcased at conferences and awards ceremonies. As a result of the training and professional network, a pool of interchangeable individuals is created who ‘occupy similar positions across a range of organizations and possess a similarity of orientation and disposition that may override variations in tradition and control that might otherwise shape organizational behaviour’ (Perrow, cited in (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)). The role of consultants also contributes to knowledge transfer across the multiple organisations where they are engaged.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) state that it is through formal education that new models diffuse rapidly. This is not the case with ITIL as it is only very recently that university courses have included ITSM concepts (Cater-Steel & Toleman, 2007).

Normative isomorphism also occurs when personnel are filtered by hiring individuals from firms within the same industry and specifying skills for particular jobs. A search of the recruiting site seek.com.au revealed 715 positions in Australia in July 2009 specifically requesting ITIL skills or knowledge (Seek Ltd, 2009). In Australia, ITIL has become a recruiting filter for positions in IT service management.

F-6: *The greater the extent of structuration of a field, the greater the degree of isomorphics.*

In the case of ITIL, structuration is evident as ITIL recommends centralisation of IT services, definitions of roles and responsibilities for specific positions such as process owner, process manager, change manager, configuration manager, service desk manager, business relationship manager. ITIL leads to formalisation of the relationship between IT and end-users, clients, suppliers and other external organisations through the service desk function, service level agreements and underpinning agreements (ISO/IEC 2005).

ORGANISATIONAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS

Service Managers of 15 organisations were interviewed. For each of the 15 cases studied, the motivation to adopt ITIL was considered. When the motivating factors had been extracted from the transcripts, they were summarised by factor and then classified as coercive, mimetic and normative as defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and shown in Table 2. Multiple factors were reported by some managers, demonstrating DiMaggio and Powell’s view that the three types of pressures may intermingle in an empirical setting. A number of motivating factors reported did not fit these three categories of isomorphic pressure. For example, six managers reported the decision to implement ITIL was made by senior management but did not explain the type of pressure on senior management to decide on ITIL adoption. Four managers stated that ITIL was introduced to reduce costs and two to improve IT service quality.

Table 2: Factors Motivating Organisations to Adopt ITIL (Source interviews)

Type of Isomorphism Pressure and Factors Reported	# of Cases
<i>Coercive stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy. It results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function.</i>	
Influence of external actors – tools vendors, consultants, trainers	2
Legislation influence (e.g. Sarbanes Oxley)	1

External influence/expectations of users/customers	2
<i>Mimetic to model, imitate or copy processes from other organisations. It results from standard responses to uncertainty.</i>	
Notion of legitimacy – defensible	5
To secure survival against outsourcing	2
New staff member was ITIL evangelist	6
<i>Normative is associated with professionalization - the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control processes and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy.</i>	
Common language – achieved through use of ITIL books and by many staff attending ITIL foundation courses	5
To facilitate outsourcing of some services	2
Need to standardise many different processes across IT department	6
Quicker than developing processes from scratch	1
To prevent decentralisation of IT	1
Complemented Prince 2 project management framework in place	2

The organisational-level predictors proposed by DiMaggio and Powell are now considered in light of the results of the cross case analysis and recent surveys of ITIL adoption.

O-1: *The greater the dependence of an organization on another organization, the more similar it will become to that organization in structure, climate, and behavioural focus.*

This would be the case of local operations copying the lead of head office. A survey conducted by itSMF Thailand reported 13 percent implemented ITIL to follow the company’s global standard (Lawkobkit, 2008). The survey conducted at the Australian itSMF Conference in 2005 reported that both internal compliance (31%) and external compliance (27%) motivated adoption of ITIL (Cater-Steel & Tan, 2005b). In China, local operations of multinational organisations are certified to ISO/IEC 20000, e.g. Unisys, Accenture, IBM and ING (itSMF, 2009). One of the managers interviewed represented a multinational company and stated that head office had decreed that ITIL was required at all sites.

O-2: *The greater the centralization of an organization's resource supply, the greater the extent to which the organization will change isomorphically to resemble the organizations on which it depends for resources.*

In effect, if an organisation has outsourced all or part of its IT service management to an external provider that has adopted ITIL (for example IBM, Fujitsu, CSC or HP), it will be required to conform to the provider’s ITIL processes. ITIL aims to provide seamless end-to-end service regardless of the number of internal or external suppliers in the chain. The ITIL-based relationship management process from the supplier will spill over to the client. ISO/IEC 20000 mandates that certified organisations should “manage suppliers to ensure the provision of seamless, quality services” (ISO/IEC, 2005).

O-3 & O-4: *The more uncertain the relationship between means and ends, or the more ambiguous the goals of an organization, the greater the extent to which an organization will model itself after organizations it perceives to be successful.*

Even prior to the Global Financial Crisis, organisations experienced turbulent business conditions. For example, more than one government department interviewed was competing with private commercial service providers. Two of the managers stated they were adopting ITIL as a defence against the outsourcing of their IT functions. Many successful organisations are ITIL-complaint, especially the early adopters. In uncertain times, companies want to model these successful organisations – this explains the rapid increase of ISO/IEC 20000 certification shown in Figure 1.

O-5: *The greater the reliance on academic credentials in choosing managerial and staff personnel, the greater the extent to which an organization will become like other organizations in its field.*

Although ITIL and ISO/IEC 20000 qualifications are industry credentials, not academic qualifications, two of the IT Managers interviewed stated that their organisations have including ITIL skills in the position descriptions of IT staff. All organisations either organised internal ITIL training for ITSM staff, or arranged for staff to attend training off-site. Recently, ITSM courses are being offered at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in some tertiary institutions in Australia, USA and Europe.

O-6: *The greater the participation of organizational managers in trade and professional associations, the more likely the organization will be, or will become, like other organizations in its field.*

As well as the professionalisation of ITSM through itSMF as discussed with point F-5, IT managers participate in trade and industry associations which also provide opportunities to share ‘best practice’ and benchmark against industry leaders. For example, in Australia, University IT managers belong to CAUDIT (Council of Australian University Directors of IT). As well as regular meetings, CAUDIT hosts an annual conference which may account for the widespread dissemination of ITIL throughout the Higher Education sector in Australia.

DISCUSSION

From the history of ITIL and the analysis summarised in Table 2, the following factors are identified as contributing to the diffusion of ITIL:

- OGC put coercive pressure on UK government departments to adopt ITIL
- ITIL books are readily available at reasonable cost from OGC, itSMF Offices
- itSMF international/national offices provide support to IT Service Managers for ITIL adoption
- Professional network exists through itSMF conferences, local interest groups, special interest groups, regional seminars
- ITIL certification is readily available for individuals – international offerings, consistent, regulated
- When ITIL is adopted by head office it diffuses to national/local offices
- Adoption spreads as ITIL evangelists move from one organisation to another
- Decision to adopt is influenced by legislation (e.g. SOX) and desire for better IT governance
- Industry press reports extensive ITIL adoption (e.g. Computerworld, ZDnet)
- Tools vendors provide ITIL-compatible systems for configuration management, service desk (e.g. HP, IBM).

However it is interesting to note that the factors thought to have influenced other management fads have not been evident up to this point in time: academic research into benefits of ITIL; widespread activity of Universities incorporating ITSM in curriculum; and pressure from purchasers for example, mandated ISO/IEC 20000 compliance in RFQs for ITSM. These activities are starting to happen now and will possibly contribute to further pressure to institutionalisation and isomorphism.

From the analysis of the interviews, a number of factors indicate evidence of ‘faddish’ or mimetic adoption. In many cases, the prime motivation appears to be that ITIL is considered to be the best course of action solely based on its popularity – a case of ‘I’ll have what she is having’. Very few of the Service Managers could confirm that a business case was developed and approved for their ITIL implementation. It appears that many organisations want to ‘play it safe’ i.e. adopt practices that have worked well for successful organisations. However, successful ITIL adoption requires a change in the corporate culture as well as significant investment.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this research has identified that the three types of isomorphic pressure as defined by Di Maggio and Powell (1983) have influenced the adoption and diffusion of ITIL. Coercive pressure has been applied from customers, governments, IT service providers, hardware suppliers and head office. Normative pressure has been effected through the highly organised and effective itSMF industry network and training accreditation schemes. Mimetic pressures are also evident as organisations imitate the processes and systems adopted by industry leaders, and that are described in published case studies in industry press. Using institutional theory as a lens, the analysis at both field and organisation level supports the view that ITIL processes have become *fashionable* and institutionalised; they have travelled through time and space.

The analysis of the case studies is limited by the fact that only one interview was held with each organisation. Multiple points of view, especially from more senior managers would have provided more depth to the analysis.

Future research will delve more into the concept of Weber’s ‘iron cage’ – a reference to the restrictive effect of the growing trend towards bureaucratisation (1952). The question is whether ITIL adoption reduces agility and flexibility of IT organisations? Future efforts may also consider if the methodology used in this study could be applied to other popular and emerging IS management frameworks e.g. CobiT, or ISO/IEC 38500 – the international standard for governance of IT.

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