

OK. So you have decided that your organization has to improve the way in which it works. You have chosen to implement a methodology as the best way to achieve this goal. And now you ask yourself, where do I start? Whatever the discipline you are trying to model (from software development to supply chain management), it is highly probable that a standard framework exists, that can serve as the basis for your own methodology.

WHAT IS A STANDARD FRAMEWORK?

A standard framework is a set of best practices, normally expressed as a set of repeatable processes created by an organization (a professional association, university, public administration, etc...). These frameworks are sometimes referred to as bodies of knowledge, methodologies, etc...

Standard frameworks cannot be applied out of the box. They are aimed at a wide spectrum of organizations and thus cannot be detailed to a level at which they are ready to use. In order to have an executable set of processes, a project has to be undertaken in order to fill the gap between the framework best practices and your methodology executable processes. This gap is filled when you have translated the best practices into concrete procedures and policies that take into account the characteristics of your organization and its environment.

For example, when the framework says "determine which risks might affect the project and document their characteristics" the methodology can say "the project leader registers all project risks in the risk list and documents its characteristics". The methodology also provides a link to the excel spreadsheet that is used as a template for the risk list, and a description of the project leader role in the organization (skills needed, minimum experience, etc...)

Some of the existing frameworks that can be used as a base for a methodology are the following:

- IT Service Management: ITIL / COBIT / MOF
- Project Management: PMBoK / PRINCE2
- Software Development: RUP / OPEN Process Framework
- etc...

ADVANTAGES OF USING A STANDARD FRAMEWORK

- You can take advantage of the work made by experienced professionals in the field.
- It establishes a standard terminology, that enhances communication both internally and externally.
- It facilitates process benchmarking, so that you can know how well you are performing compared to other organizations.
- Software vendors create products that are compliant with the framework, so you will be able to find software that automates your processes smoothly.

- Your employees are motivated. They learn something that adds value to them professionally.
- Mainstream frameworks evolve over time, so you will be able to enhance your methodology.

WHICH FRAMEWORK SHOULD I CHOOSE?

When choosing a framework the following must be taken into account:

- Research and investigate. It is normal that several frameworks exist for one discipline.
- Determine which standard best meets your needs in terms of industry, size of the organization, etc...
- Determine how the standard integrates with standards of other disciplines.
- Evaluate the structure of the framework. Does it have a uniform structure and format for all process descriptions? Does it name roles consistently?
- Evaluate scope. Does it contains all the processes you need to describe? Does it make reference to the supporting systems? - Does it contain guidelines and templates?
- Evaluate accordance to your company characteristics. You might find that one standard is too heavy for your needs.

Having said this, please note that processes that seem very complex in the framework can be implemented through very simple processes that embed the most value-adding best practices.

SUGGESTIONS

- Implement processes gradually and start with those processes that demonstrate most value.
- Choose a winning framework used by a big number of organizations.
- Choose a framework that maps to a Capability Maturity Model. This way you can have a roadmap and gain visibility on where you want to be.

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