



**IT Service Management (ITSM)** is a discipline for managing information technology (IT) systems, philosophically centered on the *customer's perspective of IT's contribution to the business*. ITSM stands in deliberate contrast to technology-centered approaches to IT management and business interaction. The following represents a characteristic statement from the ITSM literature:

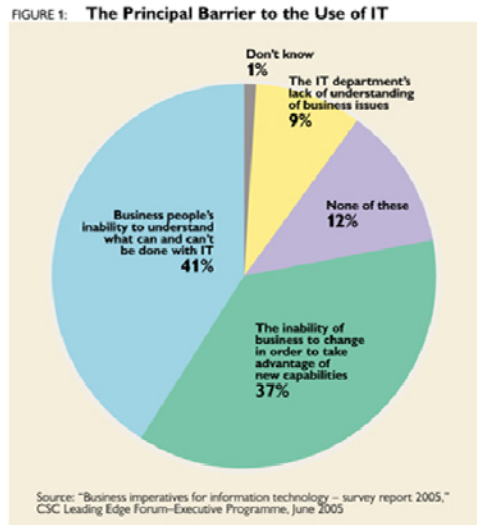
*Providers of IT services can no longer afford to focus on technology and their internal organization, they now have to consider the quality of the services they provide and focus on the relationship with customers.* <sup>[1]</sup>

(1) IT Service Management Forum (2002), in van Bon, J.: *IT Service Management: An Introduction*. Van Haren Publishing. ISBN 90-806713-4-2. Emphasis added.



## IT & BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

For the longest time it was perceived that the IT organization did not understand the issues the business was facing and therefore not able to deliver applications, systems and services that the business needed. In 2005 a survey completed by CSC of senior business and IT executives showed that the perception had reversed, the business themselves believes they are the principal barrier (see figure 1).



So what is the answer to removing these barriers? I believe that the answer lies in a formalized collaboration between the business & IT. In my previous articles on Shared Services I talked about IT becoming a service organization, and that one of the key reasons of Shared Services failure is communication. IT needs to create positions in their organization as relationship managers to address this issue, open avenues of communication and ultimately partner with the business. This resource aligned in a partner role serves as a consultant to the business. They facilitate the discussion of business needs and requirements, they help educate the business on applications, systems and services. These relationship managers work with their businesses to achieve business goals. Some organizations turn to an IT Service Management (ITSM) model to fill this process. The only issue I see with the ITSM model is that it can take a more introspective role, with IT thinking only about the delivery of IT to the business as opposed to a more outward facing approach with IT thinking about the 'information' needs of the business. A tool that I have successfully used as a relationship manager is the "Partnership Agreement". This document is more than just service or operational level agreements, this agreement defines the nature of the relationship and aligns to the key strategies and major

initiatives between the two organizations. It is intended to be a living document that can be modified to meet the needs of both parties. The outline of this agreement is as follows;

### Relationship Philosophy

An outline of the what the business and IT would like to accomplish with this document.

### Partner Plan Staff

Names, titles, contact information and roles of people engaged in this agreement

### Engagement Strategy

This sections outlines the various formal meetings between IT and the business, the purpose, who attends and how often they happen. For example there are commonly monthly service reviews between the relationship manager and the business manager, quarterly reviews of business initiatives with a larger group and annual alignment meetings covering budgets and strategies with upper management.

### Shared Objectives & Initiatives

This section lists all of the shared objectives and initiatives.

### Action Plan

As the shared objectives and initiatives are scheduled they are placed on the action plan with action items identified and names assigned.

### Acceptance

Once the agreement is defined and agreed upon by both sides, it is signed by the Relationship manager, the business manager, IT Manager and Business line manager. This helps to strengthen the commitment to this agreement.

### Appendices

If there are any SLA or Operational Level agreements they would be included here.

This is but one basic but key tool the relationship manager can leverage. It is ultimately the partnership formed between the relationship manager and the business manager that makes this process work. Another plus of the relationship manager model is that it also works in successfully managing an outsourcing relationship.

If you are interested in learning more about IT and Business Relationship Management, please contact the MINCON Group.

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