

Learn & adapt with ITIL 4 – Why stories matter!

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What does ITIL 4 have to do with the eternal, human practice of storytelling?

Though you might already believe it instinctively, there is substantial research into the importance of narrative and storytelling to human beings.

For example, a study that exposed people to a film of seemingly-random shapes interacting with each other led 98% of the participants to describe what they saw in a *narrative*. This is something we all do naturally in real time.

Another research project involved having a group of authors write short narratives about a number of low-value objects bought at thrift stores and garage sales. The money the objects generated, when sold on eBay alongside their “stories”, increased 27 times; so stories create meaning and value.

These are just two examples of why stories are important and reflect TSO’s commitment as a publisher to use this approach. And this goes to the heart of ITIL 4.

ITIL 4 – a golden opportunity

The entire shape of ITIL 4 is influenced by AXELOS listening to stories from the community and re-telling them in the form of a *Golden Thread*: a narrative that runs through the new best practice guidance published by TSO. Including the narrative is a first for an AXELOS technical publication.

This has involved the input of Katrina Macdermid, ITIL Human Centred Service Design Consultant. She has applied design thinking to ITIL 4 which is about understanding the behaviour of users, their different motivations, limitations and environments. Her work on the guidance has supported the ITIL 4 emphasis on the importance of collaboration, transparency, automating where possible and working holistically.

In practice, the Golden Thread narrative features AXLE Car Hire, a fictional company staffed with named characters in roles including CIO, product manager, IT delivery manager and customers. This allows people studying and certifying in ITIL 4 to understand service management principles and the co-creation of value through following the story of AXLE’s challenges and journey to improve using ITIL.

Having a Golden Thread gives candidates a way to translate theory into practice and see the application of what they’re learning. Its relevance to everyday working life and situations shows how it’s much more about delivering value than creating processes.

Choosing a fictional car business for the narrative resonates with a global audience, not least because of the way travel is currently affected by the 4th Industrial Revolution in the shape of autonomous vehicles. This story and its cast of characters will continue into other, future ITIL 4 guidance.

Learning to tell your business story

Having worked on ITIL best practice for more than 30 years, we knew this narrative approach would help ITIL 4 reach the widest audience possible, while reflecting the core expertise of the main guidance.

It demonstrates how the power of storytelling benefits professionals working in IT, data and analytics as much as anyone: with the ability to go beyond the data and describe a context that is both intellectually and emotionally engaging, IT experts can create powerful narratives to help deliver value and successful business change.

People are simply more motivated when they understand and can re-tell the story of their own business and the part they play in it. This is truly an exciting prospect and is a new departure for the delivery of best practice.

This use of storytelling is a fundamentally human-centred design approach to support the creation of future best practice content. The response to this concept when I presented it at Pink 19 recently was very encouraging, with people telling me it had opened their eyes to the use of storytelling.

And it was satisfying to reinforce the fact that – in sharing their best practice experiences with AXELOS – they had all been played a part in the story of ITIL 4.

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