itSMF UK

Bupa – ITIL Maturity Model assessment and its contribution to transformation and continual improvement

Interview with Lis Hyett

Director, Technology Service Operations,
Internal Products & Platforms, Bupa BGUK

For any organisation undergoing transformation, understanding the current state of operations is a crucial first step. This is particularly important in service management, where the maturity of the organisation directly affects the effectiveness of change. In this article, Lis Hyett examines how Bupa uses the ITIL Maturity Model not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a catalyst for achieving service excellence and promoting continual improvement.

Bupa operates with a federated structure comprising five business units and a central shared service. The company recently undertook a transformation journey with a clear goal: to enhance service operations across all units while ensuring consistency in execution.

However, the maturity levels varied significantly throughout the organisation. While some centrally-delivered services, such as major incident management, were well-established and stable, the maturity within individual business units was inconsistent.

In response to this challenge, we initiated a service excellence programme, recognising that any meaningful improvement must start with an honest assessment of current capabilities. Drawing on a previous positive experience, I turned to the ITIL Maturity Model assessment delivered by itSMF UK – a framework aligned with ITIL principles – to gain a clear view of the organisation's maturity.

The results of the assessment were not entirely unexpected but proved to be invaluable. It reaffirmed existing gaps and increased awareness of the maturity levels across business units. This common understanding informed Bupa's broader transformation, an initiative that began at the end of 2024 and is scheduled to continue into early 2028.

From insight to action

The insights gained from the maturity assessment were rapidly implemented. We identified areas such as problem management and knowledge management as underperforming, making them key focus points for improvement. One of the main challenges was not the design of processes, but rather their adoption, especially within the business units.

The technology department, acting as a market unit, worked closely with these business units to improve the execution of critical processes. At the same time, we launched a large-scale ITIL 4 training programme, with up to 300 staff members participating at least at the ITIL 4 Foundation level. For many employees, this offered a chance to transition from the legacy ITIL v3 framework to the more modern and flexible approach of ITIL 4.

This new approach aligned closely with ITIL 4's guiding principle: "start where you are". By assessing the current state, Bupa could prioritise investments in processes that would yield the most significant returns. While automation was a key driver, the message was clear: automate only what is optimised, as there is little value in automating inefficiencies.

A realistic view of maturity goals

While achieving capability levels of four or five across all processes is an understandable aspiration, Bupa's leadership recognises the practical and financial limitations associated with such a goal. Therefore, the focus is on improving the processes that deliver measurable value. This approach ensures resources are directed toward achieving meaningful outcomes rather than simply ticking boxes.

The recommendations from the initial maturity assessment were incorporated into the broader transformation roadmap, prioritising areas with lower maturity scores. For example, integration of practices such as problem management with the development process and tools. The ITIL Maturity Model was crucial in identifying these issues, enabling us to implement corrective actions that improve operational flow.

Reintroducing continual improvement

One of the key findings from the maturity assessment was the absence of an effective continual improvement process. Although actions were being tracked in spreadsheets, there was no structured approach integrated into the service management platform. As part of the transformation, Bupa implemented a continual improvement process and activated the module in ServiceNow. This is being rolled out as part of transformation to all business units, which will include linking initiatives directly from problem records.

We considered this a success because it established a straightforward process and educated employees on the importance of aiming for permanent solutions in problem management. Instead of addressing isolated incidents, the focus should be on overall improvement. For example, if we resolve a monitoring issue for a specific service, we should also consider broader enhancements. This approach represents a formal, continual improvement process that was previously lacking.

Supporting a cloud-first, digital future

Bupa's transformation is centred on a cloud-first strategy and a shift to a digital operating model. This shift involves adopting practices such as DevOps and Site Reliability Engineering (SRE). However, implementing these models effectively requires a strong understanding of problem management, effective knowledge management and a commitment to continual improvement. A common misconception is that frameworks like ITIL are outdated in agile or DevOps environments. In reality, these methodologies depend on mature processes, making ITIL highly relevant and essential for successfully adopting these practices.

The maturity assessment also identified gaps in software asset management. This process is primarily managed by the central technology team, with some responsibilities distributed across various business units. To address these gaps, we initiated workshops to clarify ownership, streamline delivery and identify automation opportunities. Improving these efficiencies is crucial for enhancing the experiences of both colleagues and customers, reducing friction and increasing service clarity.

Looking ahead

By 2027, Bupa aims to automate 80 per cent of routine tasks within its technology operations. This automation will not only reduce operational burdens but also create new career opportunities for internal teams, allowing employees to transition toward more engineering-focused roles. Throughout this transformation, service management remains a central focus.

From an external customer perspective, improvements are already being measured through a shift from reactive "red days" to proactive "green days", highlighting the value of each process. Importantly, there is a growing recognition of the interconnectedness of service management processes. The relationships between incidents, problems, changes and knowledge are becoming clearer – and teams are beginning to appreciate the strategic value of each.

Bupa is on a three-year transformation journey and there's an acknowledgement that change will not happen overnight. The ITIL Maturity Model plays a crucial role in this journey, serving as a scorecard and a means of educating Bupa's employees on the value of service management. As a result of this lasting cultural change, the concepts of transformation and continual improvement will be integrated into Bupa's daily value delivery.

Working together for better service management