What are the similarities and differences between IT-CMF and other frameworks?

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Scope of this Report

In order to answer the question in hand, we assume no previous knowledge of the IT Capability Maturity Framework (IT-CMF). In the report we are aiming to provide some illumination to the reader by:

- providing a brief history of the framework
- describing its aims
- placing it in the pantheon of process frameworks.

A brief history

In the 1990's Martin Curley at Intel was given the task of managing the company's internal IT services, at the time a bye-word for low expectations. He turned the IT Group round and wrote a book about his experiences[1]. His idea of managing IT so that it delivers business value was taken up and developed into a five-stage framework with the aid of industrial companies and academic research. The five-stage framework is clearly and intentionally based on the generic Capability Maturity framework that also underlies CMMI, People CMM and others.

IT-CMF is currently managed from the Innovation Value Institute at the National University of Ireland Maynooth[2]. Version 1 of the model was released in June 2009 and it continues to be developed by members of the IT-CMF Consortium. Members work together to bring their experience to bear and collaborate to add value to the framework. To date there has been more than 60,000 hours of research and development and over 100 assessments, with the number of assessments growing all the time.

Early users already record major savings. Examples include

- an oil company which has seen savings of $75m annually using recurring reviews of Enterprise Architecture to drive cost reductions
- a hospital found that by listening to staff it could improve record retrieval so that savings equivalent to the cost of 11 nurses were achieved.

Aims of IT-CMF

The ultimate aim of IT-CMF is to move IT from being an independent or, at best, business-supporting *cost* center to being a business integrated *profit* center for a company. IT moves from being a low value-added service to a high value-added business enabler.

The IT-CMF provides a framework designed to assess the value provided by IT to a business. Using the framework benefits both parts of the organization to the greater success of the whole. The framework is built on four Macro Capabilities (MC) with 33 Critical Capabilities (CC) supporting them
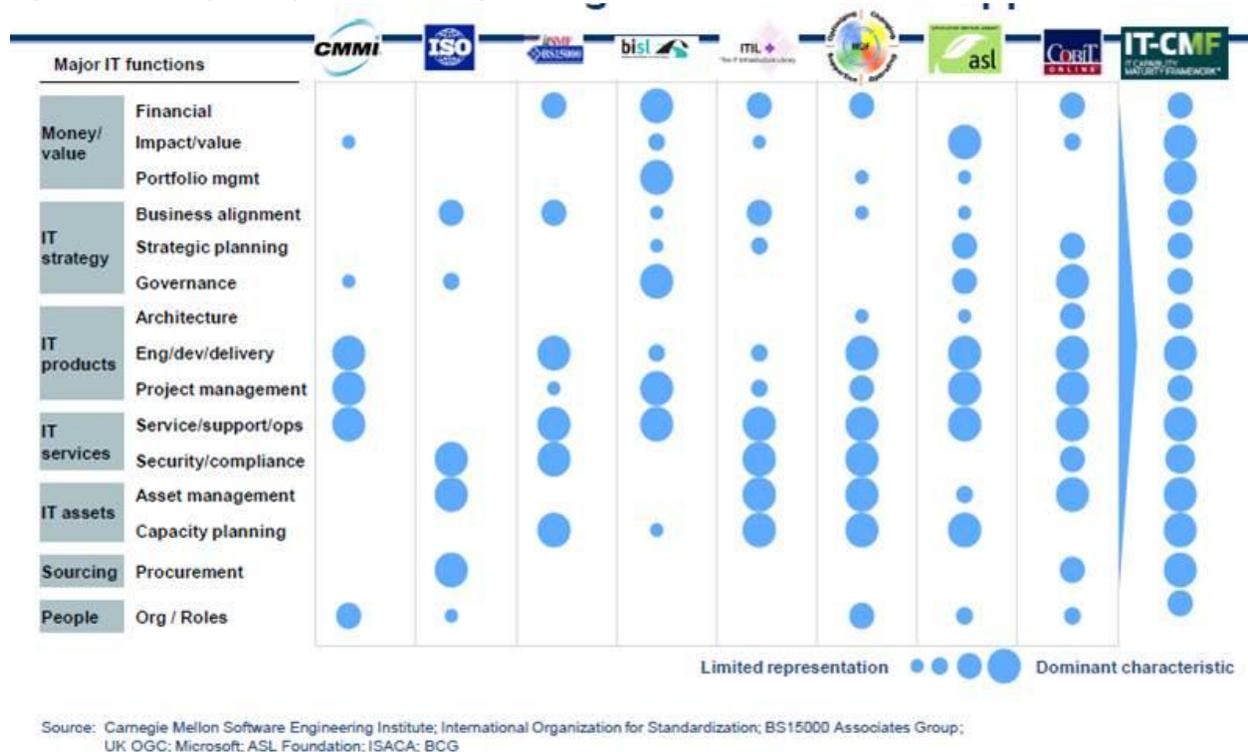
- Managing IT like a Business – 12 CCs plus Sustainable ICT
- Managing the IT Budget – 4 CCs
- Managing the IT Capability – 13 CCs
- Managing IT for Business Value – 3 CCs

Companies are assessed against maturity curves for the macro and critical capabilities, and the results are compared with a central database of other companies' maturity levels. Using the results of the assessments companies can plan to improve one or more capabilities in line with their business needs. Decisions on what level of maturity a company wishes to attain are entirely internal, and achieved improvement can be measured objectively by regular re-assessment against the external database.

Comparison with other models

Like CMMI, the IT-CMF is a five-stage model, and it has been deliberately designed to use that approach. It has been designed as a Business Centric model by CIOs for CIOs and other managers. IT-CMF does not compete with models such as CMMI, ITIL, COBIT and ISO, rather it complements them and treats them as valuable approaches to making improvements in different sub-areas of the overall business value of IT challenge (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Coverage Analysis of IT-CMF against other frameworks (Source: IVI)

Source: Carnegie Mellon Software Engineering Institute; International Organization for Standardization; BS15000 Associates Group; UK OGC; Microsoft; ASL Foundation; ISACA; BCG

Why then is another framework needed? IT-CMF explicitly addresses the goal of maximizing the value that an organization extracts from its investments in IT. Some of the other frameworks partially address this, but IT-CMF provides a business centric focus not available elsewhere.

The focus of the array of frameworks can be summed up this way
- CMMI focuses on improving the outcomes of projects

- ITIL focuses on improving the delivery of IT Services
- COBIT focuses on improving the control of the IT organization.
- IT-CMF focuses on improving the business value derived for the IT assets.

Hence, the focus of IT-CMF is on business-IT communication and assessment directed to the Critical Capabilities to identify where the business can benefit from improvement initiatives.

For each Macro and Critical Capability, there is a defined maturity curve from Level 1 (Initial) to Level 5 (Optimizing). Level 1 organizations are poorly managed and don't understand the value of their IT, while Level 5 is in the realm of continuous improvement. Organizations progress by moving up the maturity curves just as in CMMI. but there are significant differences over the mode of operation. The "breakthrough" level in the IT-CMF model is Level 3, but few companies go for an overall level of maturity. Rather, having reviewed the maturity curve for the company, management must decide which CCs have most significance so they can concentrate on those aspects of their IT that mean most to the business as a whole. It is quite possible for an organization to be operating optimally for them by being at level 2, say, in one CC while trying to move to level 4 in another.

Initially, and regularly, an IT-CMF Executive Assessment provides an overview of an organization against the global IT-CMF database. Using this input, the organization takes a view of the gaps that are most important for them and can then move to single or multiple CC assessments. These provide a deep dive into each selected CC with a view to identifying areas for improvement. Change programmes based on the identified gaps can be implemented and the IT-CMF is used to determine overall progress at a pre-determined dates. In some organizations, Assessments are repeated annually to give senior and other managers a view of the ongoing effectiveness of IT and it's alignment with changing business value priorities

Conclusions

IT-CMF is a business-centric view of the effectiveness and value of IT that is complementary to other models such as CMMI, COBIT and ITIL. The model is still in version 1 and those of us who are working on it know that it is a work in progress. The database of results is limited but growing and as it grows its usefulness will increase. There is a big future ahead for this model as it continues to gain support from users. The cooperative development method delivers a virtuous circle as it continues to grow the assets, so the more users contribute the more they will benefit.

Sources (longevity of links not guaranteed!):

1. Managing Information Technology for Business Value; M Curley, Intel Press 2004
2. http://ivi.nuim.ie/ The IVI site provides details of the model and extensive bibliographies in support of it. Underlying collateral is available to members.