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The synergies and duplications of IT Asset and Configuration management

Posted August 20th, 2014 by [Derek Lonsdale](#)

In the several years I have implemented service management for IT organizations ranging from small to large, public as well as private, I've often observed a continuing confusion about how to treat two particular service management processes: asset management and configuration management. Where ITIL combines the two processes as a single process, Service Asset and Configuration Management (SACM), some IT organizations prefer to keep these processes fairly separate. Implementing these processes as a single process could ignore the level of detail needed for tracking assets and maintaining configuration items accurately. On the other hand, when these processes are implemented separately, there is a potential for duplication of efforts, technology and work products among these processes. So, which approach is the right one: separate processes or a single process? Is there a right approach? What factors can help you determine the best approach for your IT organization?

To address these questions, let's take a step back, and think about how asset management and configuration management processes have evolved historically. The following diagram shows the evolution of these processes since the early 1950s:

<<<click the images for a larger view>>>

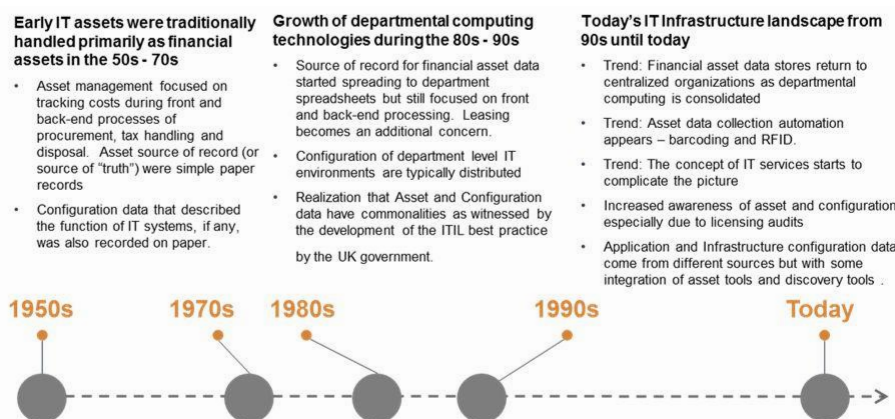


Figure 1. Timeline of the Evolution of Asset and Configuration Management Processes

It is evident that during the 1950s – 70s the separation of Asset and Configuration Management processes was clear, but since the advent of the concept of an IT service, new technologies and new infrastructure configurations, the separation is not very clear, and there have been questions about whether one can replace the other. In

my view, the processes cannot replace one another as they are equally important, and they overlap and depend on one another. An understanding of IT assets and configuration items, which are at the core of these processes, can help better comprehend this overlap and interdependence.

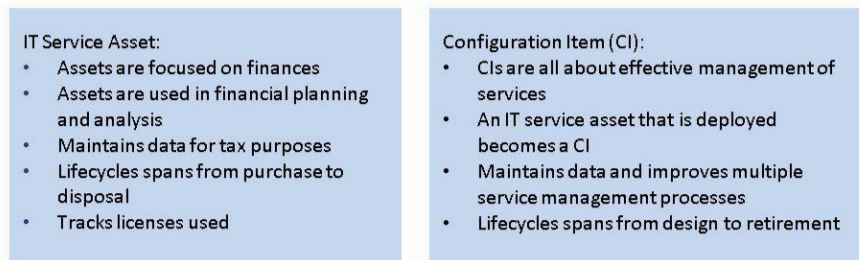


Figure 2. IT Service Assets and Configuration Items

Now, let's think about the focus areas for Asset and Configuration Management processes.

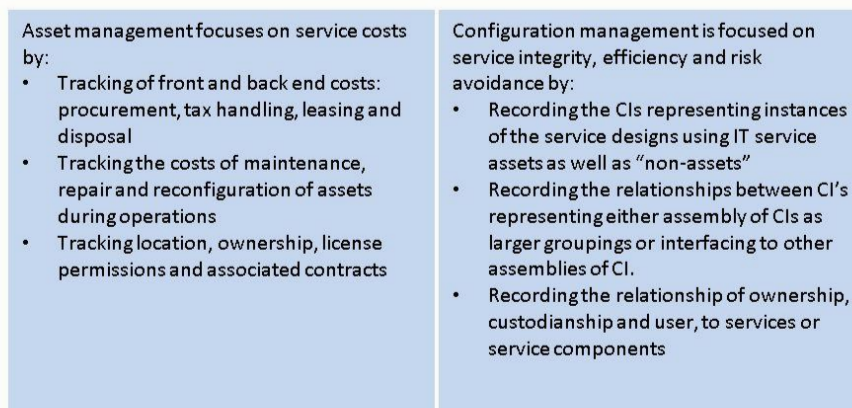


Figure 3. Focus Areas of Asset and Configuration Management Processes

It is clear that the Asset and Configuration Management processes focus on different areas but there is a significant amount of interaction between these processes as shown below:

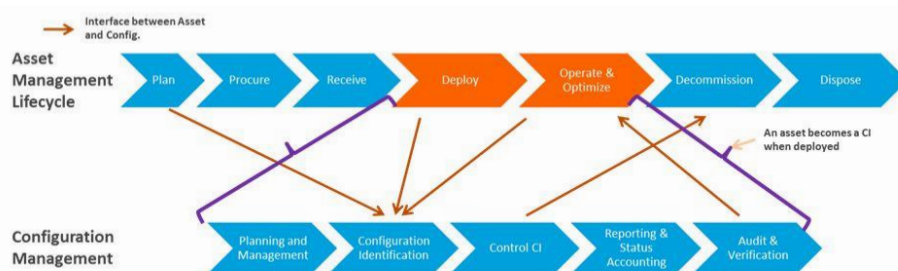


Figure 4. Interface between Asset and Configuration Management Processes

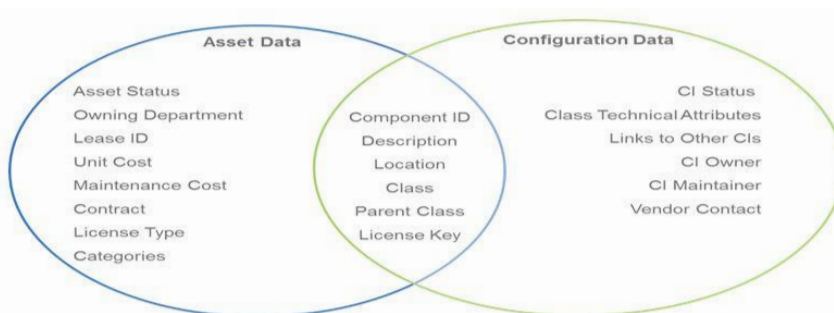
So far, I've highlighted that the answer to the questions posed in the beginning of this column is that there is no one right approach (separate processes vs. single process) to treating Asset and Configuration Management processes. At this juncture, we should review some of the future key trends which concern the Asset and Configuration Management processes and can be summarized as the internet of things and virtualization:

- The inventory of IT assets will expand as new technology introduces new IT components that provide new kinds of business data and new business services based on this data
- Existing data – the internet of people – email, spreadsheets - remains but volume grows
- IT technology is introducing the internet/intranet of things – A Health Care example:
 - Hospital beds with network connections that deliver patient medical vitals.
 - Imaging from CAT, NMR and X-Ray - transmitted over the network
 - Remote medicine in the form of Telehealth - exams, operations.
 - Tracking of drugs and materials
 - Personal medical wearable instrumentation that transmit data
 - Internet connected pace-makers
- Configuration items that are not tangible IT assets
 - Examples: Virtual machines, Business and IT services, Service Level Agreement documents, etc.

Since there is no one right approach to implementing Asset and Configuration Management processes, how does your IT organization ensure that the interactions between these processes are maintained, duplication of processes, technology and efforts is avoided, and the organization is ready to tackle the future trends? One of the most effective ways to ensure your IT organization achieves these objectives is to consider the difference and similarities between the IT assets and configuration items, and design the two processes in concert with each other based on the component lifecycle by following these steps:

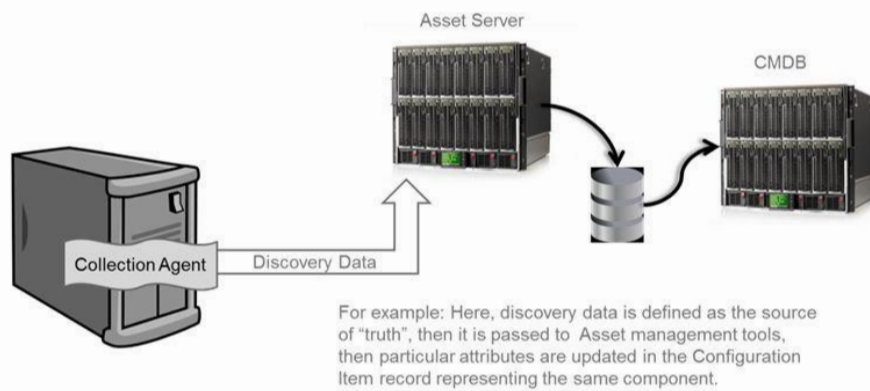
Step 1. Data classification

- Develop a comprehensive data model and dictionary for both Configuration and Asset Management. What are the common attributes? What are the specific attributes to each process?



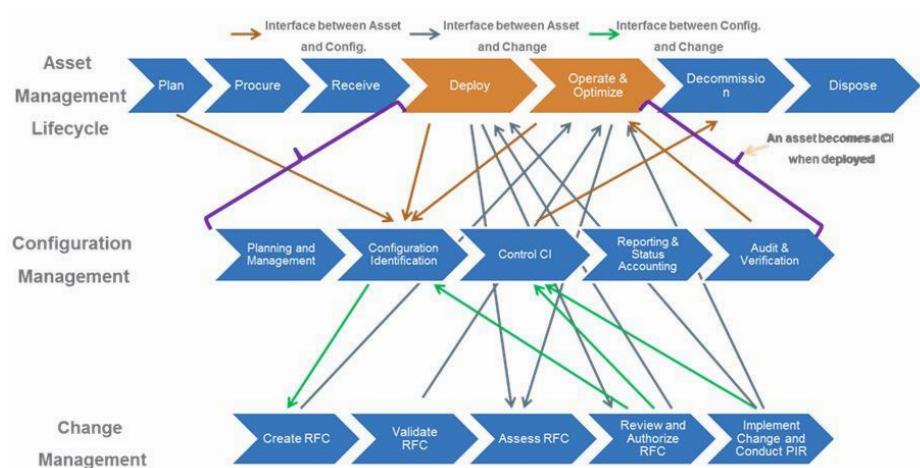
Step 2: Technology

- Rationalize your sources of “truth”
- Design data flow use cases – What source is used? How does data get collected? How is data transported, transformed and delivered to consumers of data?



Step 3: Design the component life cycle

- Develop an overarching lifecycle process that includes the touch points between both Asset and Configuration Mgmt.
- Include other touch points with important processes like Change Management.
- Use the data flow use case decisions to craft the Asset and Configuration Management processes



Step 4: Process Design

- Don't recreate the wheel, use best practice as published by itSMF, ISACA, IAITAM, etc. Adopt and adapt the practices to your environment
- Do not duplicate processes or procedures in both processes

Step 5: Establish Governance

- Finally, ensure clear roles and duties are delineated across the IT Asset, Configuration, Change and Release Deployment processes.
- Employ effective IT process governance
 - Define Critical Success Factors, Key Performance Indicators and Measures (i.e. IT service request fulfillment cycle time, License true up and contract renewal cycle time)
 - Hold regular process performance reviews involving process managers, process improvement teams and IT management to determine any improvement opportunities – especially between Asset and Configuration teams.

- Interface with Enterprise Architecture and Application teams to ensure early involvement with new services

The above approach of designing the component lifecycle results in the following benefits which help your IT organization achieve its objectives:

Issues addressed:	Example:
Reduction of operational risks from duplicate data	Having the ability to accurately count the number of servers by having one source of truth
Reduction of operational risks from inefficiencies	Optimizing server provisioning by having integrated processes across the asset lifecycle
Reduction of operational costs	Minimize people on bridge calls during critical outages by identifying the end to end configuration model associated with a major change
Reduction of operational risks from duplicating efforts using multiple redundant technology	Servers were scanned with both network scanners and server-centric discovery tools
Reduction of operational risks from inconsistent data	Accurate data will stop you from deploying the wrong package to the entire enterprise when only a small number of desktops require the package

Ability to address issues like:	How:
Service delivery costs	By collecting the service delivery costs from incident, problem, change and release & deployment efforts associated with a particular service or category of asset classes by reporting back Configuration Item relationships
The Total Cost of Ownership of a service	By rolling up the individual procurement costs of each asset that are associated (via CI relationships) to a service
Licensing risks	By using asset data, license reconciliation processes along with configuration data will identify the highest non-conformity risks and provide accurate data for mitigation efforts

In conclusion, regardless of how you implement the Asset and Configuration Management processes, it is important that the interactions between these processes are maintained.

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