



Elevate Your ITAM Program by Aligning and Managing Best Practice Frameworks

By Terry Divelbliss & Steffani Lomax

Imagine this scenario: you have decided to build a house but have no idea how to go about it. You engage an architect who draws up detailed plans which are essentially the blueprint for building your house. The architect then provides these plans to the builder who will employ contractors to lay down the cement foundation, framing, walls, roof, and plumbing and electrical systems. By following many well-documented and coordinated steps, essentially a framework, these skilled practitioners are able to successfully build your house.

In the business world, a framework represents the individual guidelines, policies, and procedures a company implements to enhance and improve its overall business operations. Many organizations have adopted and implemented frameworks around various business functions. Frameworks are organized sets of information around which a program can be developed. Most frameworks provide broad, high-level guidance on areas that should be included in a program, as well as some best practice advice. Some frameworks are more detailed and prescriptive than others, with the more comprehensive ones providing detailed steps to follow.

About Frameworks

Frameworks have been established for many IT disciplines including Cyber and Network Security, IT Asset Management (ITAM), Software Asset Management (SAM) and IT Service Management (ITSM), to name a few. Common frameworks that you'll likely recognize include:

- ISO 19770-1
- IAITAM IBPL (Best Practices Library)
- ITIL
- COBIT
- NIST's Cyber Security Framework (CSF) and Risk Management Framework (RMF)
- GDPR
- Health Insurance Portability and Privacy Act (HIPAA)

Most frameworks include a hierarchy of elements:

- Controls, or areas to be managed
- Policies, or expected behaviors or responses to situations
- Efforts, or tasks
- Practices, or procedures.

There are numerous benefits to using frameworks, especially when creating a program from scratch. First and foremost, those who adopt them are able to re-use the collective experience of organizations that have previously implemented successful programs. The framework helps establish controls and ensures that all key areas are covered and nothing critical is overlooked. The end goal is to increase efficiency and improve business outcomes.

It's not uncommon for an organizational team to select and apply elements from multiple frameworks to a single program or initiative. Most teams also have "homegrown" processes that continue to work well for them which are often incorporated into the mix.

However, there are some common challenges and failure points around adopting and implementing frameworks. These include:

- Managing the hierarchy of elements within a framework, from overarching controls to policies to the tactical processes and steps within a practice
- The successful integration of key business functions such as IT Asset Management, Risk Management, Data Mapping, and many more
- Issues around accountability and responsibility, where there's a disconnect between what needs to be done, who does it, and how it is measured
- The definition and establishment of measurement mechanisms for all systems and data involved
- The prioritization of activities

Framework Management Tools

So how do you avoid these potential pitfalls? And how do you keep track of which elements you're using from which frameworks? There is an emerging new class of Framework Management tools specifically designed to help you get the most out of your use of frameworks to guide your programs and initiatives. In most cases, the functionality in these tools originally derived from broader tools that were dedicated to managing specific IT disciplines, but there are now also standalone tools for framework management.

These tools act as central hubs that account for a lot of moving parts and they integrate closely with other systems that include various aspects of your programs:

- IT Asset Management (ITAM)
- Software Asset Management (SAM)
- IT Service Management (ITSM) and CMDBs
- Network and Cyber Security
- Risk Management, and more.

This enables framework management tools to encompass and include your assets and configuration items, people, providers, locations and more. If it plays a role in your program, it can be included and managed from that perspective.

Map and Align

With these framework management tools, you have the ability to map and align each of your processes or practices with the element that is being used as a guide. These can be entirely new processes, or existing processes that work as-is or have been revised using the new guidance. Mapping processes to elements of the framework can show why and how you're doing them.

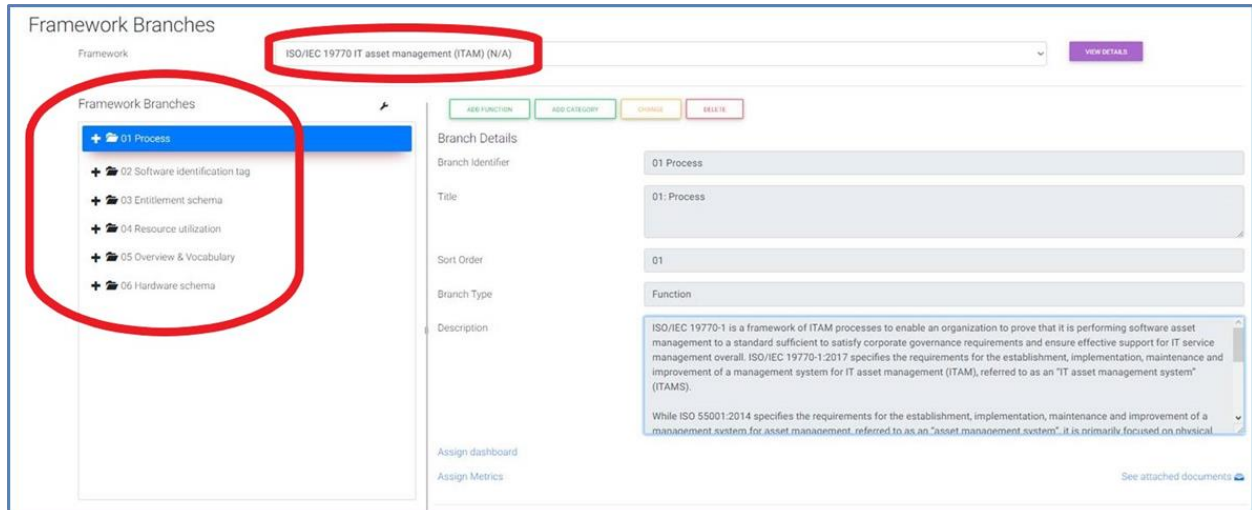


Figure 1: Documenting the Framework, Program and Elements

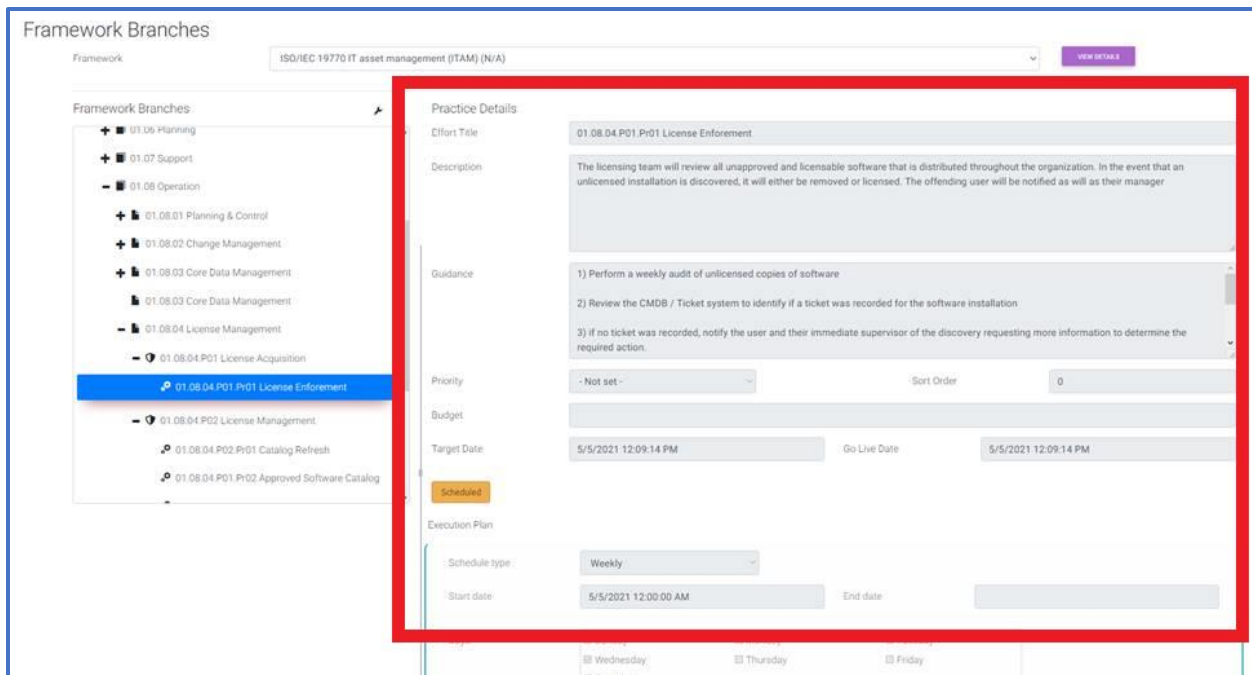


Figure 2: Tracking Practice Details: Knowing What to Do, How and When to Do It, and Why

Assign Ownership and Accountability

A key step towards a successful program and framework implementation is to set expectations and remove ambiguity by assigning ownership and accountability. These may be assigned to the program as a whole, or to specific practices and process steps. This makes it easy to see who is responsible for an activity, as well as any other individuals or “actors” who may be involved at any point along the way.

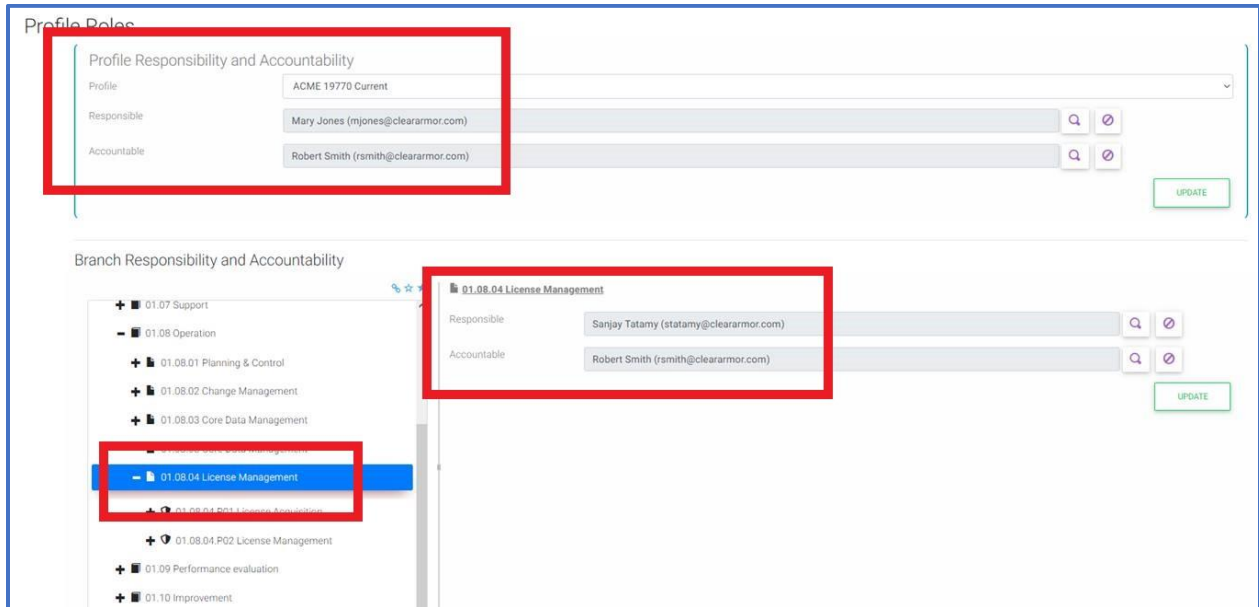


Figure 3: Tracking Responsibility and Accountability for a Program and Specific Elements

Prioritization

As any manager knows, not everything can be the most important. Whether it's Cyber Security, Software License Management, or any other discipline, the level of corporate and financial risk varies tremendously. It's important to prioritize, make decisions accordingly and document and communicate them. For example, it will be clear within the framework management tool which asset classes, systems and processes are highest priority and which ones can be deferred if necessary with minimal risk.

Metrics and Measuring Progress

As with any successful project, having the ability to measure progress and make adjustments along the way is essential. It's important to know what work has already been done for the high-level program as a whole, as well as for specific tasks and efforts. It's also very helpful for planning and resource allocation to know what work still remains to be done.

A Framework Management tool enables you to set targets or KPIs at various levels, and then shows you metrics around how close you are to achieving them. These reports, which can show various perspectives, provide key visibility for management and project champions.

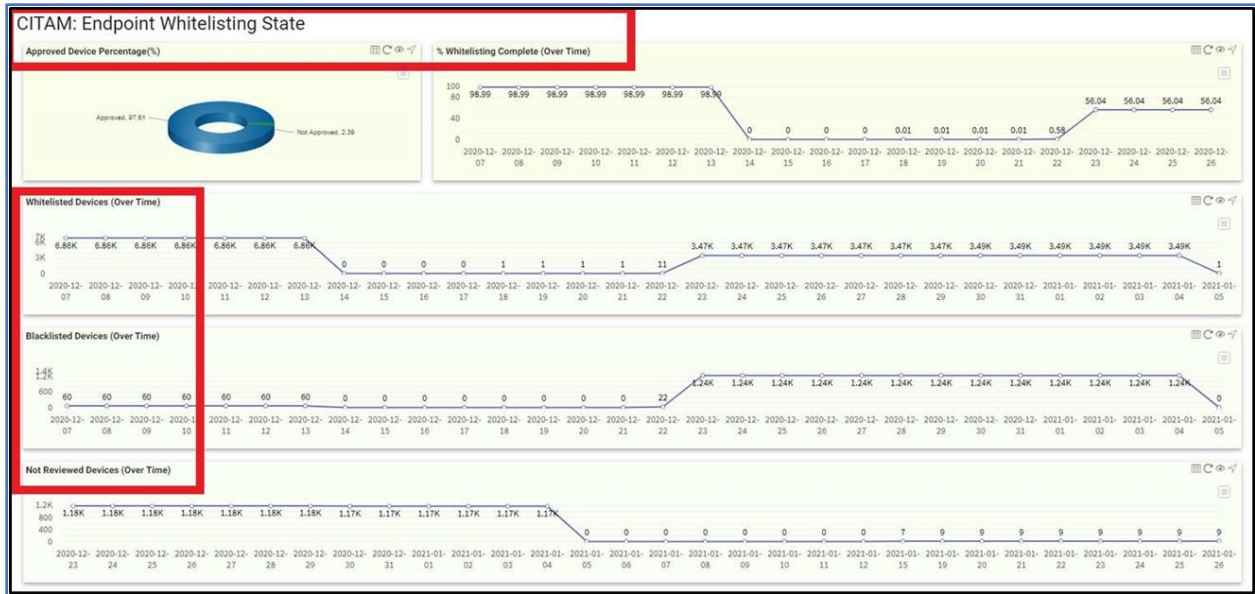


Figure 4: Trending Metrics Report

Using Framework Management Tools for ITAM and SAM

Let's take a closer look at managing frameworks for ITAM and SAM programs, specifically.

Whether you use aspects of ISO 19770-1, IBPL or another framework for these programs, each can help provide best practices guidance and overall structure for your program. They can be of assistance in designing, refining and implementing your program, as well as documenting and sharing company policies and procedures that should be followed. Frameworks vary in the level of detail that they provide, but the more prescriptive frameworks can assist you in designing effective process steps and methods, and can also help you optimize and improve existing processes.

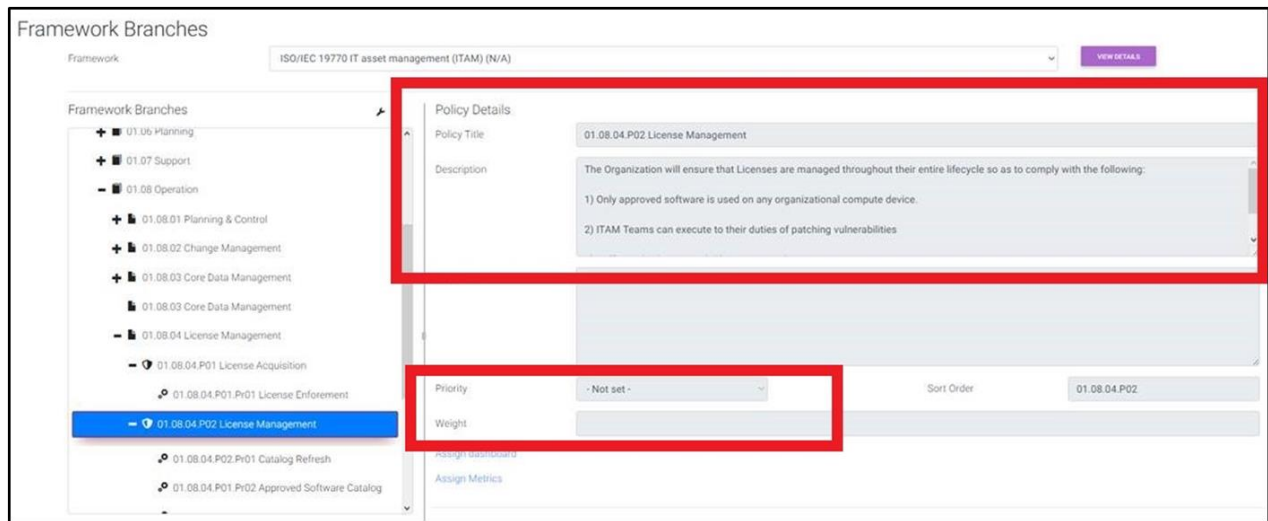


Figure 5: Policy Management and Prioritization

Since your ITAM and SAM tools support your company's ITAM and SAM processes, the better the processes, the more effective your management tools will be. Better framework and process management combined with your ITAM and SAM toolset can result in better business outcomes.

Managed Assets and Licenses

As mentioned earlier, Framework Management tools can be closely aligned with your asset and CI records via integration with your ITAM, SAM, IT Service Management and Security toolsets.

This comes into play when looking at everything that's involved with your program and its framework. You get a full picture of everything that is being managed from processes, tasks and procedures to the assets themselves, in a single pane of glass view. Framework Management tools provide an overlay to see how everything fits together.

Mapping and Landscapes

Let's examine why it's important to have integration between Framework Management tools and other tools that include details about your asset base. Most IT-related frameworks require your organization to define the role that each and every asset or CI plays in your environment and ecosystem. This can be done in the tools manually on an asset-by-asset basis, or Application Mapping and Infrastructure Mapping tools can automate and simplify this process.

Mapping provides a visual depiction of relationships between assets and CIs, as well as the potential impacts on your business operations if one of these assets or CIs goes out of service for any reason. You'll know what and who will be affected.

Assets and CIs can be mapped from multiple perspectives in Framework Management tools. First, they can be mapped to the systems to which they belong, such as Financial or HR systems. They can then be mapped to Landscapes, such as Production, Development, Testing or Disaster Recovery. One asset may be part of multiple systems or landscapes, and mapping will show this.

Finally, data types may be mapped as well, indicating a level of risk, among other things. You may have data that is personal (PII), subject to GDPR protections, customer credit card data, and more. Once assets and CIs and data are mapped, you can then run reports from multiple perspectives. Some examples include vulnerabilities by systems that process specific types of data, or vulnerabilities by system and production landscapes, and many other specific combinations.

Continuing the mapping theme, Framework Management tools also enable you to map Systems and Landscapes to one or more business owners. This provides clear documentation of who is responsible and accountable for them.

Summary

Your organization has invested the time and effort to review, select and adopt elements from at least one best practices framework, with the goal of improving your business processes and realizing the maximum results they can provide. A Framework Management tool provides structure and a repeatable methodology to ensure that your program is actually leveraging the guidelines provided by the framework(s). With detailed metrics about a broad range of topics, you'll have the visibility needed to identify potential gaps, make ongoing improvements and demonstrate progress and the value of your program and daily activities to executive leadership.

About Eracent:

The Framework Management functionality discussed in this white paper – *which can support frameworks for any IT discipline* - is provided within the Intelligent Cybersecurity Platform (ICSP) from ClearArmor™, which is Eracent's security-focused subsidiary. ClearArmor provides Cybersecurity Resource Planning (CSRP) solutions that support enterprises as they plan, document and implement repeatable cybersecurity processes to achieve and maintain compliance with NIST, ENISA and GDPR guidelines. To learn more, visit www.Cleararmor.com.

Eracent has focused on developing comprehensive IT Asset Management (ITAM) and Software Asset Management (SAM) solutions since 2000. These tools help our enterprise clients optimize their spending around hardware and software licensing and subscriptions, automate and streamline their ITAM and SAM processes, and reduce corporate risk around software publisher audits and network and endpoint security threats. To learn more, visit www.Eracent.com or contact us at info@eracent.com.

About the Authors:

Terry Divelbliss is the Senior Vice President of Marketing and Alliances for Eracent. He has over 30 years of software product management and marketing experience, and he has been active in ITAM and SAM for over 20 years. His hands-on experience includes working with large client organizations to plan and implement ITAM repositories and, in parallel, more efficient business processes. In addition to numerous ITAM and SAM-related certifications, Terry holds an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh.

Steffani Lomax is Eracent's Vice President of Channels and Alliances. She is responsible for developing strategic alliances to expand and grow the business through her relationship-building, business network and industry expertise. For the past 19 years, Steffani has been in the SAM industry which began by co-founding a consulting firm that specialized in process improvement. She has since run channels and alliances for software and consulting firms. Her experience includes leadership roles managing customer success teams at Tivoli and IBM. Steffani holds a BA from Bates College and an MBA from Boston College.



Eracent
519 Easton Road
Riegelsville, PA 18077 USA

www.eracent.com