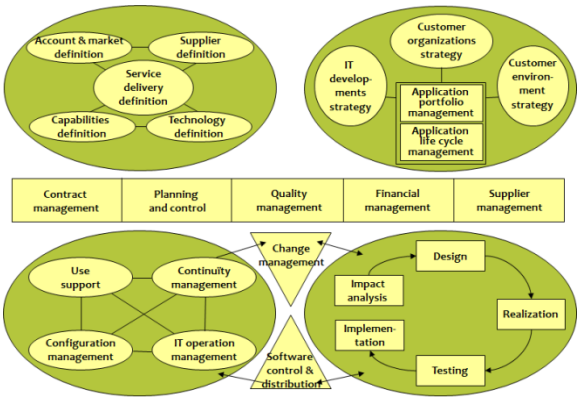
ASL 2, An introduction

Machteld Meijer and Louk Peters



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Introduction

In 2002, the Application Services Library (ASL) was launched into the public domain as a framework for application management. The framework is promoted and supported by the ASL BiSL Foundation and sponsored by both IT service providers and user organizations that benefit from sharing their best practices and using a knowledge platform for application management. The adoption of ASL in the market was quite fast, and it was implemented in many organizations, primarily in the Netherlands. Due to the developments in the application management domain a new version of ASL (ASL 2) was published in 2009 to ensure the framework could keep on providing the answers to both present and future questions.

Goal

In this article we describe the main features of ASL 2. The framework has not changed radically since its inception. This fits into the philosophy of taking an evolutionary approach to improve in small steps, whilst protecting current investments in good practices. The biggest changes in ASL 2 refer to the changed positioning of internal and external suppliers of IT services in the market. This change in perspective has a great impact, not so much in the structure of ASL, but in how application management and processes fit and should be implemented in the future world of demand and supply (delivery).

Why ASL?

There are several reasons why application management should be done professionally:

- *Lifecycle of applications*
  The dependence of organizations on the performance of applications has grown enormously in recent decades. This dependence and the size and complexity of modern applications make the introduction of a new business-critical application a costly and risky undertaking. Replacing applications is often postponed so applications have a longer lifecycle than anticipated and adapting applications that were already adapted several times before, makes management and maintenance of these applications more complex and expensive.
- *Chain management of applications*
  Nowadays information technology provides organizations with extra opportunities to work together and to interlink their information systems. In a network the functioning of one application is dependent on the other. Establishing clear responsibilities and ownership, and a good cooperation between the IT management domains are therefore essential. The constellation of IT providers has become more complex over the last decade. Therefore managing the suppliers is now an essential part of application management.
- *Increasing competition*
  Outsourcing IT activities decreases the need of organizations to have their own fully equipped IT department and it pressures the remaining fully equipped IT departments to

compete harder with the outside world. Service providers should continuously ensure the enhancement of quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the information provisioning.

- *Differentiation of service provisioning*
  The boundaries between service provisioning of standard applications and customized applications have become less clear. The same applies to the difference between development and maintenance. Several new roles of service provisioning by application management organizations, like portal, integrator, implementer, have emerged and this has a huge impact on how processes are implemented and executed.
- *Cost reduction*
  Important applications are often huge and replacement costs are substantial. This means that active monitoring of investments in applications and infrastructure is of great importance. When we look at the life cycle of an application then it turns out that some 25% of the costs is related to the initial development of an application and about 75% is related to the exploitation, maintenance and management of the application.

What is ASL?

ASL is an abbreviation of Application Services Library. It is a vendor-independent method for the implementation of application management in the broadest sense of the word. ASL aims to professionalize the management of applications. Not only within an organization, but also as a unifying factor between different organizations. It aligns to ITIL, a commonly used framework for service management with a focus on infrastructure management. ASL consists of a framework and a library of best practices in the area of application management. Application management is focused on the maintenance of the functionality and operation of the application. ASL aims that business processes are supported optimally with information systems during the entire life cycle of those business processes. The standardized approach of ASL contributes to the professionalization of the IT organization and facilitates a more efficient way of working, cost effectively and better understanding and communication between the involved parties.

ASL 2 framework

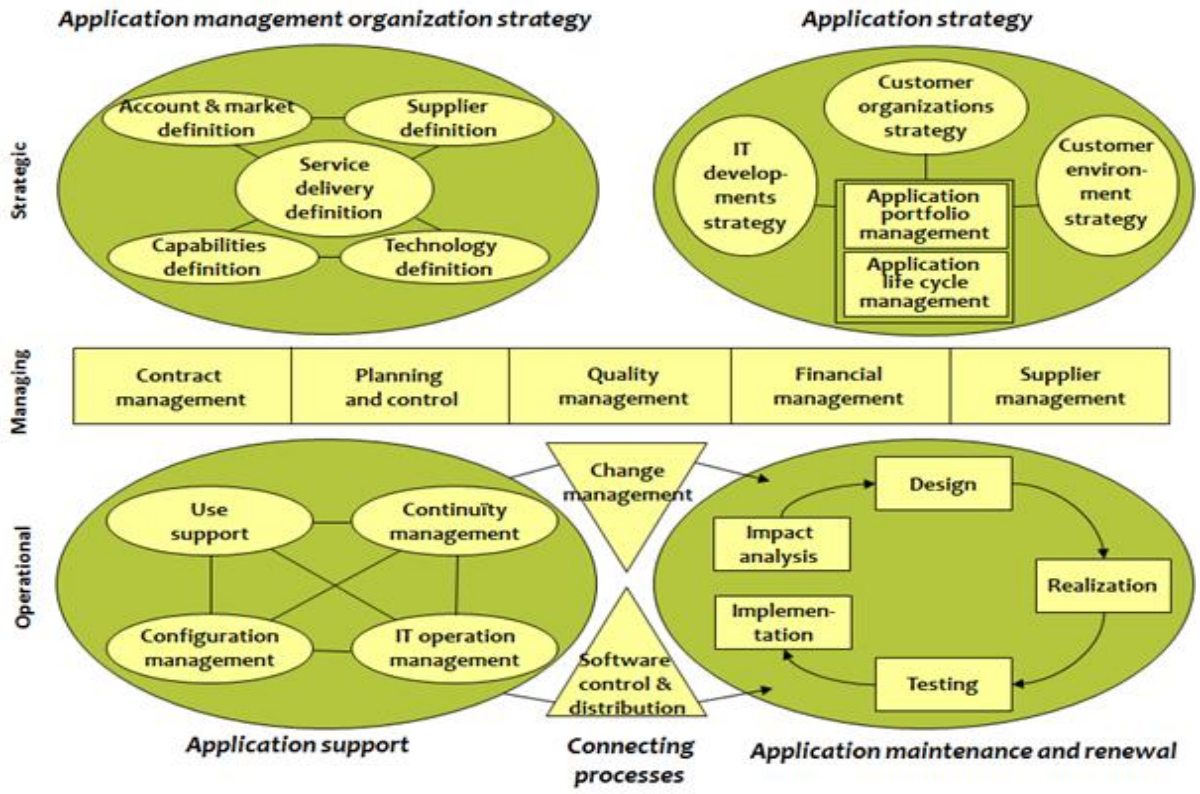


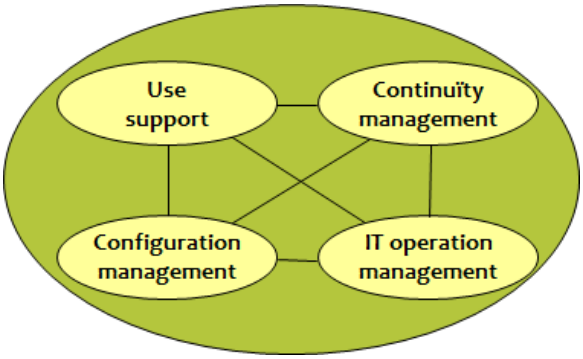
Figure 1 ASL 2 Framework

ASL 2 consists of 6 process clusters and a total of 26 processes on three levels. Within the framework the three levels, six process clusters (a, b, ….) and number of processes () are:

1. Operational:
    a. Application support (4)
    b. Connecting processes (2)
    c. Application maintenance and renewal (5)
2. Managing:
    a. Management processes (5)
3. Strategic:
    a. Applications strategy (5)
    b. Application management organization strategy (5)

Process clusters:

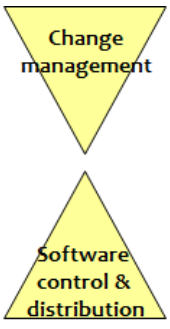
1a Application support



The application support processes aim to ensure that the current applications support the business with a minimum of resources and operational distortions.

Use support handles the communication from and to users. On the one hand, dealing with service requests, incidents and other calls and on the other hand pro-active communication to users to enrich and improving the use of an application. Among other things it takes care of the activities of a service desk.
Configuration management covers the activities to record and maintain the information about the use of (or versions of) objects that are part of an information system or application and its relevant services.
IT operation management monitors (parts of) applications and ensures that they function the way they should do according to the (service level) agreements. The quality aspects that are monitored are reliability, availability and capacity.
Continuity management considers all measures that must be taken to ensure the continuity of execution and support of the information provisioning by means of information systems in the long term. Take for instance when a disaster strikes, back-ups schemes should be in place, as well as physical security, fraud prevention etc. The topic security is part of this process.

1b Connecting processes



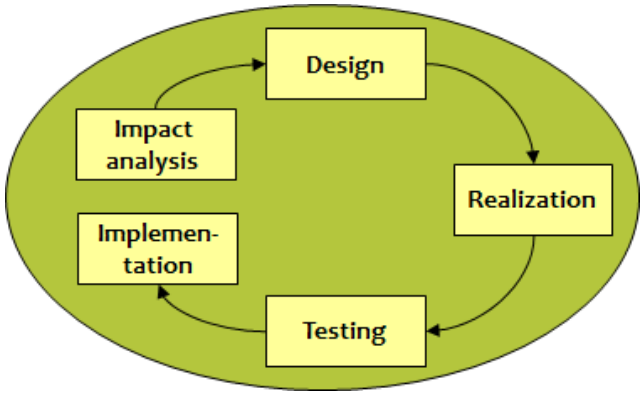
The connecting processes ensure the synchronization between the application support processes and the application maintenance and renewal processes.

Change management gathers, clusters and plans desired changes into releases or projects. This results in agreements on the content and delivery date of the release (governed by contract management).
Software control and distribution ensures the definition, recording and distribution of all objects of the application to the development, test or production environment and is responsible for the version control of the application objects. Objects may be programs, modules, data definitions, designs, test sets, compiler scripts, etc.

Change management is the ’entrance’ to, and software control and distribution acts as the ‘exit’ from the application maintenance and renewal processes.

1c Application maintenance and renewal processes

The application maintenance and renewal processes are similar to application development. They ensure that the applications are adapted to suit the changing demands and wishes resulting from changes in the environment and business processes.



Impact analysis is responsible for carefully analyzing the consequences of proposed changes (in terms of resources, time, etc.) in order to choose the right solution.
Design translates the user requirements or changes therein into a functional design in such a way that they can be realized and tested unambiguously.
Realization converts the designs or changes to the designs into concrete and correct changes in the automated information system.
Testing validates whether the objects that have been designed have actually been realized and whether the changed applications are manageable and operable.
Implementation encompasses all activities that must be performed to deploy the changes into use and operation in such a way that a flawless and error-free use of the new version of the application is ensured (i.e. conversion, acceptance testing, education, instruction, migration, etc.).

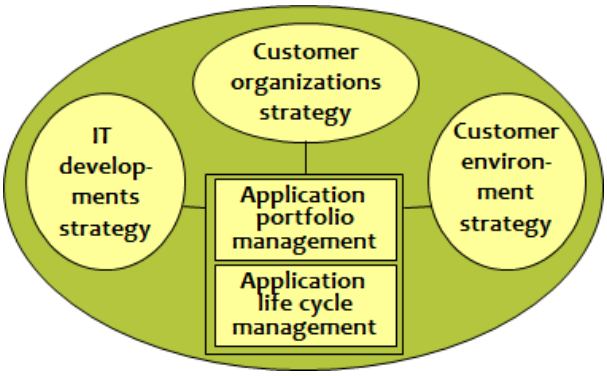
2a Management processes

The management processes ensure that existing activities are performed according to goals, agreements and chosen strategies.

Contract management	Planning and control	Quality management	Financial management	Supplier management

Contract management ensures that the services are realized according to agreements (or deviate from these agreements by mutual consent), in order to fulfill or exceed the expectations of the customer by defining and monitoring the services and its service levels.
Planning and control ensures that the agreed upon services are realized using the right human resources and in accordance with the agreed delivery date, by the correct deployment of human resource capacity at the right time.
Quality management ensures the (internal and acquired) quality of process, product, resources and organization by defining and monitoring these, and also to ensure that the relevant regulations are implemented and followed. Quality management also determines possible and desired structural improvements and ensures that these improvements are realized (problem management). These improvements can arise as a result of incidents, user acceptance tests, system tests etc.
Financial management ensures that the costs incurred for maintaining applications and/or providing services are planned and managed and are in balance with the benefits made by application management. Prices that reflect the current market and transparent and consistent charging are important topics.
Supplier management makes, monitors, evaluates and improves agreements on the service provisioning of suppliers of the application management organization. Supplier management resembles contract management but the main difference is that the latter deals with customers of the application management organization.

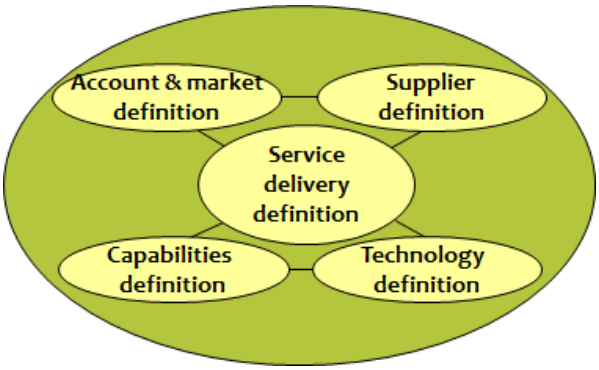
3a Application strategy



Application strategy focuses on the future and the life cycle of the objects (applications) that are part of the information provisioning.

IT developments strategy looks at which current and future technological IT developments may be of interest for the customer organization. Not only technology in the sense of application development but also new media, new audiovisual developments can create new possibilities for the customer organization (i.e. social media).
Customer organizations strategy identifies the current and future developments within the customer organization in order to pro-actively define the impact of these developments on the application portfolio. This pinpoints any constraints that application may have for these developments, and how these constraints could be tackled.
Customer environment strategy analyses developments in the exchange of information and data between various organizations ('information chains') and uses this to gain insight into the requirements to and opportunities for the applications.
Application life cycle management defines the future strategy of an application and translates this into actions so that the application can support the business processes for the years to come.
Application portfolio management identifies the significance and the performance of the various applications in an application landscape for the user organizations and coordinates the larger investments and changes therein. It develops a strategy for the future of the 'objects' in the application portfolio.

3b Application management organization strategy



Application management organization strategy aims to ensure that the service organization's policy and its future are correctly shaped. It focusses on what kind of service provider an organization wants to be in the near future, with what kind of technology, and with which competences.

Account and market definition is responsible for recognizing the demands of future services for future customers and ensuring that the relationship and communication with the customers are good enough to realize this.
Capabilities definition defines the skills, tools and expertise of the application management organization that are needed for the future service provision.
Technology definition is the process that selects the tools that will be used by the organization to realize the future services.
Supplier definition defines the role and the involvement of external suppliers in the services that will be provided, sets up a policy and translates this policy into a practical, functioning organization and structure.
Service delivery definition defines the application services to be provided in the future (2 to 3 years),taking in consideration the market, the accounts, the capabilities and technology, and translates the options and limitations into a coherent policy.

What can you do with ASL?

ASL provides guidance to help you to structure and visualize the activities that take place within your application management organization and to locate any gaps between what should be done and what is done in reality. ASL can also help as a communication instrument because with a clear definition of concepts and activities it may smooth the communication between i.e. infrastructure (hardware) and application management staff. The ASL BiSL Foundation's website provides access to articles and best practices from other customers and suppliers and these can help you to gain a further understanding of how ASL can support your organization. The recommended approach is to 'cherry pick' and use the parts of ASL that appeal to you while applying common sense in translating them to your particular situation.

ASL in relation to other frameworks

Application management doesn't live in splendid isolation. There are other IT management domains and standards/frameworks to consider. For instance there is ITIL which deals with IT service management as a whole with an emphasis on the IT infrastructure management domain. Next to the operations and application perspective, one can look at the information provisioning from a user or business perspective. A well-known public domain framework for this perspective is BiSL (Business Information Services Library). BiSL describes the processes and activities on the demand side of information provision.

A number of papers on the relation between ASL and other frameworks and standards can be found on the website of the ASL BiSL Foundation.

More info

The official website of the ASL BISL Foundation contains a lot of best practices, publications and articles on ASL: http://www.aslbislfoundation.org/en .

This paper is based on:

Remko van der Pols, ASL2, a framework for application management, Van Haren Publishing 2012

Machteld Meijer, Processen van applicatiemanagement, Checklisten informatiemanagement, SDU uitgevers, 2010 (in Dutch).

Dr. Machteld Meijer, expert on ASL and BiSL, is a self-employed senior consultant at Maise. She is chief examiner for APM Group for the ASL and BiSL examinations, a member of ISO working groups and an active member of the ASL BiSL Foundation. She is author of many publications. Further details and publications at http://www.maise.nl.

Louk Peters is a senior business consultant at KPN Consulting. He has a lot experience with professionalization within private and public organizations. He is (co)-author of books and articles on IT service management, a popular speaker at forums in the Netherlands and abroad and a guest lecturer at several educational institutes. Website: http://loukpeters.nl/english.html