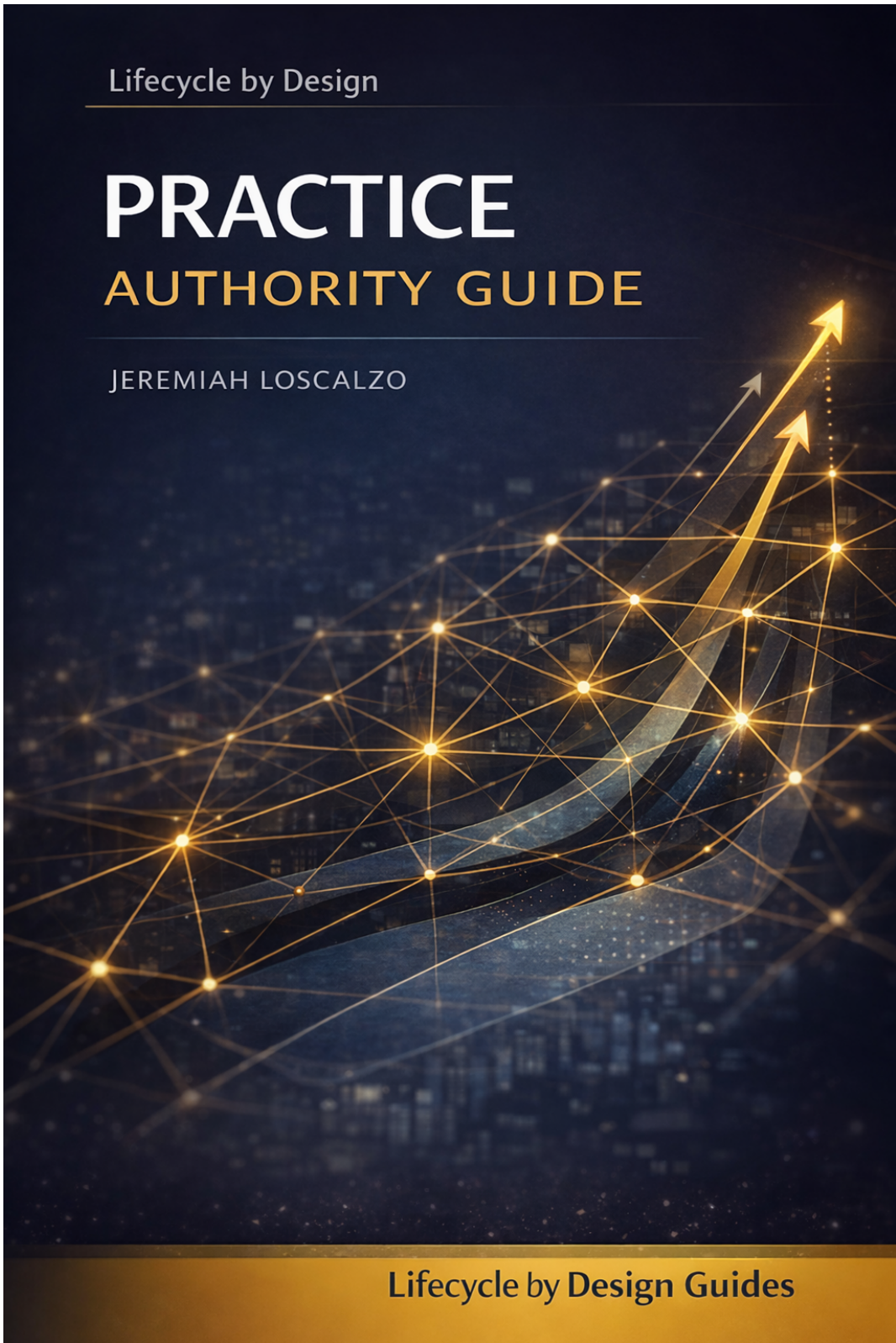


Lifecycle by Design

PRACTICE AUTHORITY GUIDE

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Lifecycle by Design Guides

Abstract

Practices play a critical role in the evolution of IT services organizations, yet they rarely begin as formal structures. In most cases, practices emerge organically from delivery teams as expertise accumulates across projects and engineers begin to codify successful approaches into repeatable patterns.

This guide explores how that evolution occurs and why it matters.

The progression from delivery capability to formal practice represents a structural shift within services organizations. Early stages are characterized by individual expertise and project-driven learning. As knowledge is captured through reference architectures, delivery runbooks, and reusable deployment models, patterns begin to form. These patterns enable organizations to standardize solutions, accelerate proposals, and deliver work more predictably.

When properly structured, practices provide pattern authority while delivery teams retain responsibility for execution. This division enables organizations to learn from every project and continuously refine their services. Over time, these patterns can evolve into commercial service offerings that are easier to sell, scale, and deliver.

Understanding this progression is essential for service leaders seeking to build sustainable portfolios, reduce operational friction, and convert delivery experience into structured, repeatable services. Practices are not simply communities of expertise; they are the mechanism through which organizations transform accumulated knowledge into scalable capability.

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Introduction: Why Practices Matter

Every services organization accumulates knowledge through delivery.

Engineers solve complex problems. Architects design solutions that succeed in real environments. Delivery teams refine their approaches through repeated engagements, discovering what works, what fails, and what must be adjusted in the field. Over time, this experience becomes one of the most valuable assets a services organization possesses.

Yet experience alone does not create organizational capability.

In many organizations, knowledge remains tied to individuals or individual projects. A skilled architect may know how to deploy a complex network architecture. A delivery team may understand the right approach for migrating a data center or implementing a new security platform. But unless those lessons are captured, structured, and reused, the organization continues to rediscover the same solutions again and again.

Practices exist to solve this problem.

A practice transforms delivery experience into reusable knowledge. It captures the patterns that emerge across projects and converts them into reference architectures, standardized delivery models, reusable runbooks, and structured service offerings. In doing so, practices allow organizations to move beyond individual expertise and begin building institutional capability.

This transformation rarely happens through deliberate design at the beginning. In most services organizations, practices emerge organically. They begin as delivery capability within project teams. Certain individuals develop deeper expertise and become the people others turn to for guidance. Over time, those individuals begin documenting successful approaches, and patterns start to form. What began as delivery knowledge gradually becomes structured capability.

Recognizing this evolution is important for service leaders because practices play a central role in the scalability of a services organization. As patterns become formalized, services become easier to sell, easier to deliver, and easier to improve. The organization begins to learn from its work rather than simply completing it.

This guide explores how that evolution occurs.

The sections that follow describe the progression from delivery capability to mature commercial practice. Each stage represents a shift in how expertise is organized, captured, and applied across the organization. Understanding these stages provides a practical framework for service leaders seeking to transform delivery experience into repeatable, scalable services.

Practices are not simply communities of technical expertise. They are the structural mechanism through which services organizations convert experience into capability.

This is a very real transition pattern in IT services organizations, and it happens more often than most leaders admit. Many practices did not start as practices. They started as delivery capability inside a tower, account team, or project group. Over time, they accumulate patterns, reusable knowledge, and commercial identity — and eventually differentiate from delivery.

Understanding that evolution is important because it explains why so many organizations struggle with authority, portfolio clarity, and commercialization.

Let's break the evolution into stages.

1. Delivery Capability (The Origin)

In the beginning there is **no practice**.

A technology or skill emerges because delivery teams need it:

- A network team learns SD-WAN
- A cloud team begins building landing zones
- A security group develops incident response expertise
- A data center team becomes strong in storage modernization

At this stage:

- The capability **lives inside delivery**
- Knowledge is **tribal and project-based**
- There is **no standardized offering**
- Sales engagement is **reactive**

The organization believes it has a “capability,” but **it is not yet a practice**.

This stage is usually invisible to leadership.

2. Informal Expertise Hub

Over time, certain engineers or architects become **recognized internally as experts**.

Delivery teams start calling them:

- to solve difficult problems
- to design architectures
- to help with proposals

What forms is a **gravitational center of expertise**, but it still sits inside delivery.

Typical characteristics:

- No formal budget
- No defined portfolio
- No productized services
- Heavy dependence on a few individuals

The organization begins to say:

“Those are our experts.”

But again — **still not a practice.**

3. Pre-Practice: Architecture and Pattern Formation

This is the critical transition moment.

The experts start doing something new:

They **capture patterns.**

Examples:

- Reference architectures
- Standard deployment models
- Reusable SOW structures
- Delivery runbooks
- Pricing guidance

Now something important happens.

Knowledge moves from:

People → Patterns

This is the moment a **practice is actually born**, even if the org chart hasn't caught up yet.

Delivery is still executing the work, but **pattern authority is emerging somewhere else.**

4. Formal Practice Formation

Eventually leadership recognizes the value and formalizes the function.

A **Practice Leader** is appointed.

Responsibilities usually include:

- Portfolio definition
- Reference architecture ownership
- Presales architecture
- Standards and best practices
- Sales enablement
- Innovation and roadmap

Delivery still owns **execution**, but the practice now owns **how the work should be done**.

This is the beginning of **dual authority**.

Practice = pattern authority

Delivery = execution authority

When designed well, this structure compounds learning across projects.

When designed poorly, it creates constant friction.

5. Commercial Practice (True Maturity)

The final stage is where most organizations **fail to evolve**.

A mature practice becomes **commercially accountable**, not just technically influential.

The practice begins to own:

- Service portfolio lifecycle
- Service pricing models
- Attach strategy across consulting → PS → MS
- Sales enablement
- Capability roadmap
- Partner ecosystem alignment

At this stage, the practice becomes the **engine of services growth**, not just a technical advisory group.

Delivery remains responsible for:

- Resource management
- Project execution
- Operational excellence
- Margin realization

When these two authorities work together correctly, the organization gains something extremely powerful:

Pattern learning across the entire lifecycle.

The Organizational Tension

Most IT services firms stop somewhere between **Stage 2 and Stage 3**.

They have experts, but no real practices.

Or they create practices but leave **commercial authority entirely in sales or delivery**.

The result is:

- Fragmented offerings
- Custom SOWs everywhere
- No pattern reuse
- Slow proposal cycles
- Margin erosion

This is why practices matter.

They are not simply communities of expertise.

They are **the structural mechanism that converts delivery experience into repeatable services**.

Practice Evolution Lifecycle: Converting Delivery into Scalable Capability



A Final Observation

Practices almost never emerge from **top-down design**.

They almost always emerge from **delivery gravity**.

The challenge for leadership is recognizing when that gravity has formed — and then **structuring it correctly before chaos sets in**.

2. Practice and Delivery: Dual Authority

As practices evolve within services organizations, a natural division of responsibility begins to emerge between practices and delivery teams. Understanding this relationship is essential to building scalable services organizations.

Practices and delivery do not perform the same role. They serve different but complementary purposes.

Practices are responsible for developing and maintaining patterns. They capture the architectural approaches, deployment models, and delivery frameworks that define how services should be designed. Through reference architectures, delivery runbooks, and standardized service definitions, practices transform accumulated delivery knowledge into reusable structures.

Delivery teams, by contrast, are responsible for executing those patterns in real client environments. They manage projects, staff engagements, coordinate implementation activities, and ensure solutions operate successfully within the unique constraints of each client environment.

This creates what can be described as **dual authority** within the organization.

Practices maintain authority over patterns and standards.
Delivery teams maintain authority over execution.

When this relationship is clearly defined, the organization gains a powerful learning system. Each project becomes an opportunity to validate or improve the patterns maintained by the practice. Delivery teams provide real-world feedback, while practices refine the architectures and delivery models that guide future engagements.

Without this structure, services organizations struggle to scale. Delivery teams may repeatedly design solutions from scratch, while knowledge gained in one engagement fails to inform the next. Practices ensure that learning accumulates rather than disperses.

Dual authority is therefore not a conflict of responsibility. It is a structural mechanism that allows organizations to simultaneously deliver services and continuously improve how those services are delivered.

3. Operational Implications for Service Leaders

The evolution from delivery capability to mature practice has important implications for how services organizations are structured and governed.

Service leaders must recognize that practices require more than technical expertise. As practices mature, they begin to influence multiple aspects of the organization, including service design, presales engagement, delivery methodologies, and portfolio strategy.

Effective practices typically assume responsibility for several key functions.

First, they maintain **reference architectures and delivery patterns** that guide how solutions are designed and implemented. These patterns ensure consistency across projects and reduce the need to repeatedly reinvent technical approaches.

Second, practices support **presales architecture and solution design**. Because they maintain architectural standards and deployment models, practices are often best positioned to guide how services are structured during the sales process.

Third, practices contribute to **portfolio development and service definition**. As delivery patterns mature, they can be formalized into structured offerings that are easier for sales teams to position and easier for delivery teams to execute.

Finally, practices often guide **innovation and capability development**. Because they operate at the intersection of technology, architecture, and delivery experience, practices can identify emerging opportunities and help organizations evolve their service portfolios.

For service leaders, the challenge lies in structuring practices so they enhance delivery rather than complicate it. Clear roles, defined responsibilities, and strong collaboration between practice leaders and delivery leaders are essential.

When practices and delivery teams operate in alignment, organizations gain the ability to scale expertise, improve delivery consistency, and build services that evolve through experience.

4. Conclusion: Converting Experience into Scalable Services

Every services organization generates knowledge through delivery. Projects expose new challenges, reveal better approaches, and refine the techniques used to implement complex solutions. Over time, this experience becomes one of the organization's most valuable assets.

However, experience only becomes organizational capability when it is captured and structured.

Practices provide the mechanism through which this transformation occurs. By documenting successful architectures, delivery methods, and implementation patterns, practices convert individual expertise into reusable knowledge. This allows services organizations to improve not only through the skill of their people, but through the strength of their operating structures.

The relationship between practices and delivery reinforces this process. Practices define the patterns that guide service design, while delivery teams execute those patterns in client environments. Feedback from delivery engagements strengthens the patterns maintained by the practice, creating a continuous cycle of improvement.

Over time, this cycle allows services organizations to scale their capabilities. Services become easier to design, easier to sell, and more predictable to deliver. What once depended on individual expertise evolves into structured organizational capability.

For service leaders seeking to build sustainable services organizations, understanding this progression is critical. Practices do more than organize expertise. They enable organizations to learn from their work and convert that learning into scalable services.

In this way, practices form the structural foundation that allows delivery experience to become enduring capability.