
Despite what many IT executives believe, project management is not the center of the IT universe. The META Group reports that less than half - 48 percent - of the work performed by an IT department consists of projects.

So, why do IT executives striving to create an efficient IT operation, manage costs and provide value to the enterprise still focus their organization on optimizing the practice of project management?

First, there is a lingering perception that large projects gain attention. "We're spending all this time and money on IT, we must be important," the thinking goes. But that project-as-security-blanket no longer holds. Less than half of all IT work qualifies as a project. IT is more integrated into the rest of the business than it was ten or even five years ago. And that integration requires vastly more maintenance and troubleshooting, rather than large-scale projects, to support managers and executives in affecting high-level strategy and, ultimately, improving shareholder value.

Second, even when CIOs recognize that the project-centric mentality exists in their departments, it is difficult to change. Managing behavior is a major challenge, particularly in the IT department, as John Scanlon, vice president of line of business technology management at Capital One Financial Corp. noted earlier this year in *CIO Insight*: "...You're talking about cultural change and behavior change in people, and if you have kids and have ever tried to change their behavior, you can understand how hard that really is at times," he notes.

CIOs and their staffs who fall prey to a project-centric IT-management approach should understand why that perspective persists so that they can more easily banish it to the trash heap of history and get on with the business of managing IT. They owe it to their staffs to bring about that change, and their careers depend on doing so.

"Those of you who lack the 30,000-foot perspective simply can't properly direct IT," CIO Magazine writers Edward Prewitt and Stephanie Overby told readers in April. Project management is a lower-level activity that does not offer a complete perspective of the department and the strategic corporate objectives it supports. Successful CIOs treat project management as one of several important tactics that enable the IT organization to carry out an effective IT business management strategy. In that IT-management model, the company's business goals occupy the center of the IT universe.

Understanding Business Value

Pinpointing and improving IT's contributions to business value requires a holistic IT-management approach with a firm focus on internal customers. Now that technology has been deeply integrated into every part of the organization, its use has become wedded to high-level strategic activities. The primary role of the IT function is to support business strategy and, ultimately, improve shareholder value.