



Stop All IT Projects!



Again, I was chided for saying there are no Information Technology projects. This time, the excuse was that the company built software. I countered my antagonist by asking if the same group that built their software also maintained the account system, workstations, email, and network. "No, that is a separate group." He was missing that his company's production group was not IT. Information Technology is the support group... and yes, they should not be doing anything that fails to directly affect getting product out the door or reducing costs. Every [project's goal](#) must be to deliver to the operational needs of the company—selling product—not to the [whims and desires](#) of the IT group. If a project fails to address the needs of the customer (directly or indirectly), then it should never see a penny of funding. This seems such an elementary concept, but it is routinely violated by [techno-bigots](#) trying to implement the latest toy or tool.

The Almighty Customer

Companies make money by producing a product or service. Duh. Whether the organization is a multinational corporation or a small non-profit, improving how they function requires initiatives. These projects may work directly on a production line's capabilities, implementing new state-of-the-art materials, indirectly affecting the product by enhancing the infrastructure to reduce internal costs or increase capabilities, or any number of other topics—as long as they benefit the business. Regardless, a business case must be present that improves the top line or bottom line. Adding IT resources to a project does not make it an IT project.

Imagine to upgrade software project (service patches, database optimization, break/fix are not projects). If the business is not fully engaged with the change, trouble is on the horizon. For example, the IT group has a strong business case to upgrade from Office 2003 (losing support) to Office 2010 or Office 365, but the business has to assess the impact to their productivity. Initially, it will plummet. Over time it will recover and may actually get better (I have yet to see any productivity increase from this specific upgrade). The business has little desire for the pain. Hence, an information technology group supplies the resources, the guidance on what needs to be done, and the business [owns the project](#) of implementing it based on their perceived value. This job is selling IT's roadmap. If the business does not upgrade and they are caught not having support it is their problem, not IT's.

Connecting to the Business

To help, CIOs need to get their group [closer to the business](#). There are a number of techniques for them to do this. It requires confident and mature teams—not in the individual-contributors, but in [IT leadership](#)

—from the CIO down to the first level management. The CIO needs to look at him or herself as a facilitator. It needs to be someone thinking less about his or her fiefdom and more about providing resources to the business. The resources are in three areas:

1. **People** capable of turning business initiatives into reality. The classical approach of housing IT's delivery resources away from the business will save on moving costs and make it easier for [functional managers](#), but it will destroy the teams ability to understand what the customer needs (not what they *want*, but what they *need*)

). Embed IT resources in project teams and collocate them with the business team. This improves project delivery and customer relations by merging the two teams into one.

Implementing a distributed team does, however, require strong IT leadership. Directing and coordinating a dispersed group of technical people and ensuring they get the proper care and feeding to grow and flourish is hard work. The benefit is that resources resident with the business have a thorough understanding of the business's issues and propose better solutions.

2. **Utilities** that allow the business to its job. The operative word is "utilities." Servers, telephony, networks, and COTS applications as we all know are about as unique to our companies as electricity. The goal should be to find companies that provide these utilities and [hire them](#)

3. **Visionaries** creating a cost-effective technology roadmap. Provide the architects and governance to enable the business to adapt rapidly to the future. In a highly distributed organization, where your teams [report to business managers](#) rather than in

to an IT group, aligning them to a common roadmap is difficult. The architects must be more than technical wizards; they need the ability to

[sell their ideas](#)

to the IT executives, the

[business executives](#)

, and a distributed implementation team.

Distributing Your Team



Stop all IT projects and make them business projects. Their existence simply perpetuates the old myths of [business silos](#). Technology is ubiquitous in the business and so should the IT group to support it. IT is no longer a mysterious and arcane subject practiced in computer rooms. It can be boiled down to simple tools for manipulating data for the end user to get the answer they need. Distributing the technical resources to help the business do its job is the next logical step.

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