Imagine canoeing upstream with a broken paddle. That’s effectively what today’s project managers and IT directors, like you, are doing. Whether you’re managing the corporate IT application development group—tasked with delivering the systems that keep the business running—or some other enterprise team, manual processes, disconnected tools, numerous methodologies, and scattered stakeholders have most likely left you scrambling to control projects and deliver successful business solutions.

In the United States, more than $255 billion each year is spent on IT projects. Project managers are key to ensuring these projects deliver a return on that investment. But, 62 percent of projects are delivered late, and 49 percent of projects are over budget. Project management is clearly broken.

It’s not that project managers lack the skills to manage projects. Actually, most are very good at it. Finding resources, coordinating task deliverable dates, and tracking budgets—the skills are there. What’s different is the speed and sheer complexity of business. Heightened competition, rapid advances in technology, and a global economy have organizations operating at a dizzying pace.

These changes have impacted the environment that project managers and IT directors have to work in. In response, companies have invested in a variety of project management tools. But these tools are restrictive, take time to learn, are rarely adopted, and don’t solve the bigger issues. So, team members and stakeholders resort to familiar habits of phone calls, email threads, and hallway conversations that inhibit productivity and imperil project timelines and budget.

Yet without a solution, enterprise teams face countless obstacles: redundant work, hours of unnecessary meetings, manual reporting that eats into actual work time, and a continuous cycle of hurry-up-and-finish-this-today projects that lack scope, direction, and quality checkpoints.

Fortunately, there are some things you can do to successfully manage projects in this rapidly changing environment. It starts with understanding the underlying issues and then working to improve your processes.

Here are the three leading reasons why project management is broken and ways to fix the problems.
The average IT organization spends 45 to 55 percent of its time on unplanned (and urgent) activities. Non-project work like ad hoc requests, maintenance, and fixes can distract resources and derail project plans in a hurry. Without visibility across the entire lifecycle of work, it’s nearly impossible to assess the real impact of these requests. Until you take a broader view of enterprise work, you put every project at risk of failure.

The Fix: See the big picture.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to more effectively manage all of your team’s work—not just projects—and get the visibility you need. Begin with a single place for intake of new requests and changes, whether that is a specific email address or point person. No back doors, no end-arounds. Period. Now, with all of your team’s work requests in one place, you can compare them, and prioritize them strategically so you can always make sure your team is doing the right work at the right time.

Build trust by providing visibility into the process. By creating access to project and activity information in one place, your customers can see for themselves the status of their requests without having to bombard you with emails and phone calls. And, you’ll have an easy way to demonstrate your value and results to your executive team.

When the time is right, invest in technology that can manage the entire lifecycle of work from end to end in real time. The solution you choose should be easy to use and provide additional features that make your team more productive, such as social collaboration and mobile access.
Lately, Agile is all the rage. Its more responsive approach can bring better, faster results to certain types of projects. But Agile can disrupt the traditional processes of budget forecasting, performance benchmarking, and accountability. For project managers, it means rethinking how these types of projects are managed.

Project management methodologies and frameworks come in all flavors, from vanilla to spumoni. Each of your project teams has its favorites, and you are left trying to manage them all. Whether it’s storyboards in Agile or critical dependencies in Waterfall, it can be difficult to track the various stages, let alone manage them all. You can end up with several different tools to manage each kind or, even worse, limit your team to the methodology you can support.

Even then, you still have to figure out how to manage the one-off, ad hoc requests that always make their way to you.

The Fix: Embrace the choices.

Don’t let the tool choose or limit your work methodology. For your project teams to be as effective as possible, they need to use the best methodology for the job. It’s up to you to figure out a way to support them and help them be successful.

Often, the choice of methodology is pinned on company culture. However, culture can easily be confused with capabilities. Improving the ability to support various methodologies, like Agile, will often ease cultural acceptance. Building this mixed-methodology support requires the following capabilities:

- A common understanding of the steps and rules
- Visibility, not just across multiple projects, but the entire workflow
- The ability to communicate across methodologies by understanding relevant terms
- Collaboration in the context of work, not buried in email threads and frequent meetings
- Metrics and benchmarks that are common across projects
- The ability to prioritize across a variety of ad hoc requests and projects

Like learning a foreign language—once you can understand and speak it, you expand your world. Break down the language barriers and watch your project and development teams excel.
You rely on your team members to update you on the status of their deliverables. You thought a bright, shiny, new project management tool would do the trick. But, you still get hallway updates, voicemails, and drive-bys. That’s if you’re lucky. Usually, it’s you spending the time tracking down team members for updates.

When any of those tools are not easy to use and not seen as effective, people simply don’t use them. And, that doesn’t leave you with a whole lot of options.

The Fix: Make the experience easy.

In order to get your users back on board, managing their own updates and project communication, you need to meet them where they are. That will require a change in mindset. It may sound crazy, but a spreadsheet is far better than a multi-million dollar solution if that’s what your team members and stakeholders want to use. Sometimes, simple is better.

When project management solutions are easy, you’ll find your team members become active participants. And, when solutions are as intuitive and interactive as social media or mobile apps, your team members will happily engage—ensuring quality conversations and updates happen automatically.

49% of users view project management tools as only moderately effective, and 26% view them as not very effective.
Going Beyond Fixed: Getting to Fabulous

When it all comes together—a broader view of work, an intuitive experience, and support for mixed methodologies—organizations like yours can begin to transcend traditional project management in favor of true, comprehensive work management.
Devour the Chaos of Project Management with Workfront

It’s time to love your project management tool. With an Enterprise Work Management solution like Workfront, your team will enjoy:

- an easy-to-use, adoptable platform
- collaboration in the context of work
- real-time visibility into all types of work
- multi-methodology capabilities
- customized reports and dashboards

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Endnotes


